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THE CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
LECTURES, SERIES II.  
AUTHORITY  
IN  
MATTERS OF FAITH.

BY THE

Rev. A. A. LINDSEY, D.D.  
Rev. W. L. GIBBS, D.D.  
Rev. W. B. SWANWICK, D.D.  
Rev. W. C. FORTUNE, D.D.

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**AUTHORITY**  
**IN**  
**MATTERS OF FAITH.**



**The Church Historical Society  
Lectures. Series II.**

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**AUTHORITY  
IN  
MATTERS OF FAITH.**

BY THE

REV. A. ROBERTSON, D.D.  
REV. R. L. OTTLEY, M.A.  
REV. R. B. RACKHAM, M.A.  
REV. W. E. COLLINS, M.A.

**Third Edition, Revised.**

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PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE TRACT COMMITTEE.

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## PREFACE.

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THIS volume contains the second course of lectures produced under the auspices of the Church Historical Society; their general purport is indicated by the common title prefixed to them. They were delivered at S. Peter's Eaton Square, at Shoreditch Parish Church, at S. Pancras, and elsewhere, and are now published with the addition of notes, references, and an index. It will be observed that the same ground is covered, to some small extent, in more than one of the lectures; and this indeed was inseparable from the method of treatment. But they appear as delivered, with a few verbal alterations only, as it is believed

that a certain amount of freedom and variety of treatment will only serve to place in a clearer light the real strength of our position.

The lectures can be obtained separately, as Numbers IX to XIII of the Church Historical Society's Tracts.

W. E. C.

**IX.**  
**THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH.**





# The Church Historical Society.

*President*:—THE RIGHT REVEREND M. CREIGHTON, D.D.,  
LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

*Chairman*:—THE REVEREND W. E. COLLINS,  
PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY  
AT KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

---

## IX.

# *The Bible in the Church.*

BY THE

REV. R. L. OTTLEY, M.A.,

RECTOR OF WINTERBOURNE BASSETT, WILTS;  
AND FORMERLY PRINCIPAL OF THE PUSEY HOUSE, OXFORD.

THIRD EDITION.

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## THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH.

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*Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν.*

THE very form of our subject suggests the remark that the demand for guidance—for authority in matters of faith—is characteristic of our time. It is only natural that in days of much positive and precise knowledge, of rapid processes and quickly attained results, there should be a widespread impatience of uncertainty and delay in matters of the highest concern. It does not lie within the scope of this lecture to discuss the question of authority at length: but in mentioning the Bible and the Church we cannot forget that we are naming two of the principal means which God has put within our reach for the attainment of religious and spiritual truth; and it is well at the outset to remind ourselves how real are the limitations under which any demand for clear and express “authority” can meet with satisfaction. Our



blessed Lord's own method in answering difficult questions plainly indicates that there is, and must necessarily be, an element of Divine reserve in the communication of eternal truth to men. For although there is much that we supremely need to know, there is also much which it would not profit us to know, much that in our present state we can never hope to know. In a world of mystery, of broken lights and shadows, in the midst of a scheme most imperfectly comprehended, "in the abyss," as Pascal writes, "of that boundless immensity of which he knows nothing," man has no reason to expect that he will find more express guidance than is sufficient to direct him safely towards his true goal. There is enough certainly revealed to reassure us, enough to give us hope and good confidence, enough to keep us sober-minded, humble, expectant, watchful; but it is contrary to all analogy to suppose that there should be, under present conditions of human probation, clear-cut or positive answers to every question which our restlessness or curiosity, our indolence or timidity, might prompt us to ask. There is need nowadays of the warning of a seventeenth century divine, "A false

conceit is crept into the minds of men, to think the points of religion that be manifest to be certain petty points, scarce worth the hearing. Those, yea those be great, and none but those, that have great disputes about them. It is not so . . . . Those [points] that are necessary He hath made plain; those that are not plain, not necessary. A way of peace then there shall be whereof all parts shall agree even in the midst of a world of controversies; that there need not such ado in complaining, if men did not delight rather to be treading mazes than to walk in the paths of peace<sup>1</sup>."

Yes: effort, suspense, perplexity, pain, the discipline of uncertainty and of deferred hope even in the search after truth—we are not to be spared these; it were not good that we should be spared. For we may remember two points which are prominent in our Lord's teaching: first, He reveals our true relation to God as that of filial dependence; we are children, not servants; we are sons under moral discipline and education. Accordingly, the training to which we are subjected is one that aims at

<sup>1</sup> Andrewes, *Sermon 3 On the Nativity*.

the development and enrichment of a filial character. It resembles the best type of education of which we can form an idea in its "combination of authority and liberty"<sup>1</sup>; in its care for character as well as for enlightenment; in its appeal at once to conscience and to intellect; in its demand for courage and trust as well as for fairness and patience in reasoning. The discipline of sons cannot be exactly on a level with the direction and supervision of servants. No mere dictation of explicit doctrines or precepts could develop in us first the desire, and then the capacity, of intelligent co-operation with the Divine purpose, or could stimulate the temper of filial reverence, dependence, trust, and love. For the purpose of moral education—for the awakening of religious affections—it may well be that a *minimum* of authoritative guidance will be the most effective. "Henceforth I call you not servants," says our Lord to His disciples; "for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See R. W. Church, *Pascal and other Sermons*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> S. John xv. 15.

Again, Jesus Christ taught mankind the supremacy of spiritual and eternal over temporal interests. Doubtless there is a certain spiritual discipline involved in suspense and uncertainty which is necessary and wholesome for beings constituted as we are; and if we study our Lord's method of training His disciples, we notice that to Him their ultimate spiritual welfare is always the first consideration. He does not require of them a mere blind self-attachment to His person, an unquestioning or unreasoning acceptance of His doctrine. He ever aims at awakening in them spiritual intelligence; He encourages them to ask questions; He is at pains to keep alive in them the sense of mystery, imparting to them truth as they are *able to bear it*, and concealing under the veil of parable spiritual truths which at the same time He illuminates by symbolic acts of supernatural power. He does not simply impart information, He seems rather to aim at deepening understanding. And here we have a signal mark of true religion. For, as Pascal points out, "God being hidden, every religion which does not declare that He is hidden must be false; and every religion which does not give the reason for this,

fails to be instructive. Christianity accomplishes all this: *Vere Tu es Deus absconditus*<sup>1</sup>."

## I.

Accordingly, with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, keeping in view the general conditions of the revelation given by Him, and bearing in mind "the entangled and complicated character of all human questions<sup>2</sup>," let us approach the subject which is to engage our attention this evening—that of the Bible in the Church. And first the question arises, How is Jesus Christ represented in the world now—since the time when at the Ascension His visible presence was withdrawn? The answer of the New Testament is plain enough. Christ is represented in the world by a Church, or Society; a body which is no fortuitous aggregation of individuals, but a divine creation, called into being to perpetuate and extend on earth the Redeemer's work; to be the visible guardian of the revelation made in and by Jesus Christ, *the pillar and ground of the truth*, the witness of *the faith once delivered to the saints*; to be

<sup>1</sup> *Pensées*, iii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Church, *Human Life and its Conditions*, p. 164.

the channel of God's gifts, the treasure-house of His grace, the abiding place on earth of His eternal Spirit.

This much will be generally conceded; but further it may be taken for a matter of historical fact that this Christian Society existed before there was a Christian Bible. There was a living body indwelt by the Spirit of God before there was an inspired New Testament. There were congregations of believers requiring instruction in Christian faith and duty, long before either gospels or epistles were written. The New Testament is clearly written for *Christians*<sup>1</sup>; it presupposes an antecedent knowledge of the faith; and a moment's thought will remind us that each Church to which, for example, an apostolic epistle was addressed, could only read and understand such a document by the light of a faith which it already possessed. In all communities so addressed there would be preserved the Scriptures which from time to time might reach them, and the traditional creed in accordance with which the written Word would naturally be interpreted. Thus beyond all question the Church received

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Hawkins' (late Provost of Oriel College) *Bampton Lectures* (1840), No. ii, pp. 38 f.

the Christian meaning of the Scriptures, at least in broad outline, before she received the Scriptures themselves. As a matter of fact the New Testament was not completed for at least sixty—probably more than sixty—years after the Day of Pentecost. Here then we start with a plain fact which obviously has an important bearing on our subject: viz. that the Christian Church was planted and flourished long before the Christian Scriptures existed. The general consent of the Church, gradually ascertained and enunciated in her synods, determined the contents and limits of the canon; to the Church the Scriptures belong; she is their guardian and interpreter, and she appeals to them for confirmation of the faith which she has cherished and handed down from the first day until now<sup>1</sup>.

## II.

The Church, then, and the Bible exist in the world, or rather co-exist, as “two authorities mutually corroborative of each other, and so far as individual interpretation of each [is concerned], mutually corrective of each other<sup>2</sup>”;

<sup>1</sup> Note A.

<sup>2</sup> Bp. Forbes, *An Explanation of the XXXIX Articles*, p. 95.

and this brings us to the question, What are the principles which actually guide the Church in her use of Scripture? The answer to this question will next occupy our attention.

1. First, then, the Church gives the Bible to her children, and earnestly encourages them in the study of it, with a view to confirming the faith she has taught them; to enable them to fill in, so to speak, and give substance to, the *form or outline of sound words* which they have already learned in the Creed. Two good illustrations of this use of the Bible are furnished in the New Testament itself. S. Luke, for example, explains the purpose of his gospel to be, that Theophilus may *know the certainty concerning the things* wherein he had been orally instructed<sup>1</sup>. Again, in the Acts, we find the Jews at Beroea commended because they *received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures* of the Old Testament daily, *whether these things* (the doctrines concerning Christ taught by S. Paul) *were so*<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the case of the Ethiopian eunuch before he was instructed by S. Philip illustrates the need

<sup>1</sup> S. Luke i. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvii. 11.



of some authoritative guidance, of a "hermeneutical tradition," in the reading of Scripture<sup>1</sup>. It is plain that the Church in exhorting her children to study Scripture for themselves, previously takes care to give them "the right point of view for their study<sup>2</sup>." As Hooker points out, "Utterly to infringe the force and strength of man's testimony were to shake the very fortress of God's truth. For whatsoever we believe concerning salvation by Christ, although the Scripture be therein the ground of our belief; yet the authority of man is, if we mark it, the key which openeth the door of entrance into the knowledge of the Scripture. The Scripture could not teach us the things that are of God, unless we did credit men who have taught us that the words of Scripture do signify those things<sup>3</sup>." But the Church having once imparted to her children the right point of view, impresses on them the importance and value of the private study of Scripture. Subjects which the traditional faith orally delivered had only sketched in outline, or had left doubtful and obscure,

<sup>1</sup> Acts viii. 30, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Eccl. Pol.* ii. 7, § 3.

are in Scripture "writ large,"—are expanded or illuminated. "Men fall into error," says S. Leo in the first chapter of his celebrated *Tome*, "when, being hindered by some obscurity in knowing the truth, they recur, not to the prophets, or apostles, or evangelists, but to themselves<sup>1</sup>." "This," says S. Chrysostom, "is what I am always advising you and will never cease advising you to do, viz. not merely to give your attention to what is said here [in church], but also when you are at home to be constantly occupied with reading the divine Scriptures. . . . The apostles and prophets set before all men plainly and clearly, as being the common teachers of the world, what proceeded from them, that each individual might be able even of himself to learn from the mere reading the sense of what they said; and foretelling this the prophet exclaimed, *They shall be all taught of God*<sup>2</sup>. . . . Let every one when he returns home take the Bible in his hands and reflect on the meaning of what is said

<sup>1</sup> *Ep. ad Flav. i.*

<sup>2</sup> *Opera*, tom. i, pp. 737, 739 [ed. Ben.]. The teaching of S. Chrysostom on this point is collected in *Meditations from S. Chrysostom on the Study of the Word of God*, by R. King (Dublin, 1853).

here, that is, if he would derive permanent and full benefit from the Scripture<sup>1</sup>. . . . Great are the advantages to be derived from such study. . . . It gives wings and elevation to the soul illuminated thus with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness ; . . . and what our bodily nourishment effects for the support of our [natural] strength, this the reading [we speak of] does for the spirit of man. For it is spiritual nutriment, and such as nerves the understanding and gives power to the soul ; improving its tone, imparting philosophic views, leaving it no more an easy prey to senseless passions, but giving buoyancy to its wing, and bearing it upward, so to speak, to heaven itself." "This," Chrysostom elsewhere says, "is the source from which have originated our thousand ills—ignorance of the Scriptures. Hence hath shot up the widespread pollution of heresies ; hence the wasted lives, hence the fruitless labours. For as they who are destitute of this earthly light are unable to walk in a straight course, so in the same way they that see not the rays which beam forth from the divine Scriptures, must needs fall into many

<sup>1</sup> *Opera*, tom. iii, p. 73.

errors, and that continually, seeing that they walk in darkness of the worst kind<sup>1</sup>."

2. These representative passages prepare us for the important thesis constantly maintained by the Church for fifteen centuries, viz. that Scripture is the ultimate criterion of the Church's teaching on matters of faith. Our sixth Article is simply stating the universal belief of early ages in its declaration that "whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." It is not too much to say, that "the whole weight of authority" is in favour of the doctrine of the sixth Article<sup>2</sup>. The voice of Christian antiquity on this point is unanimous, and I need only quote some typical utterances. Athanasius of Alexandria tells us that "the holy and divinely inspired Scriptures are of themselves all-sufficient for the enunciation of truth;" and that the Scriptures "are the fountains of salvation" in which "alone the doctrine of godliness is proclaimed<sup>3</sup>." Cyril of Jeru-

<sup>1</sup> *Opera*, tom. iv, p. 281; tom. ix, p. 426.

<sup>2</sup> Palmer, *Treatise on the Church of Christ*, Part iii, ch. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ath. c. Gent.* 1; *Fest. Epist.* xxxix.

saalem teaches that "Nothing at all ought to be delivered concerning the divine and holy mysteries of faith without the Holy Scriptures;" and again he plainly says to his converts, "Do not believe me simply unless you receive the proof of what I tell you out of the Scriptures<sup>1</sup>." "Keep that faith only," he elsewhere insists, "which the Church is now giving to you and which is certificated out of the whole of Scripture<sup>2</sup>." The witness of the West is similar: "In those things," declares Augustine, "which are openly set down in Scripture, all things are found which embrace both faith and conduct<sup>3</sup>." For the later Church of the East a reference to John Damascene will suffice, "All things that are delivered to us by the law, the prophets, the apostles, and the evangelists we receive, acknowledge, and reverence, seeking for nothing beyond these<sup>4</sup>." The same doctrine is taught by many mediaeval writers, and is affirmed by Roman Catholic divines of

<sup>1</sup> *Catech.* iv. 12; cp. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Catech.* v. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *de Doc.* ii. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *de Orth. Fid.* i. 1. A large number of quotations similar in purport will be found in Palmer, *Treatise on the Church*, l. c.; or in Bp. E. H. Browne's *Exposition of the XXXIX Articles*, pp. 140 f.

authority, such as Cardinal du Perron<sup>1</sup>. As late as the eighteenth century the Gallican doctor du Pin approved of our sixth Article in language to the following effect: "This (viz. that Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation) we will gladly admit, provided that tradition be not excluded which does not set forth new articles of faith, but confirms and explains these things which are contained in Holy Scripture, and fences them by new safeguards against those who are otherwise minded, so that nothing new is said, but only the old in a new way<sup>2</sup>." These are so many restatements of the axiom that what is *de fide* must be capable of proof from Scripture. The tradition of faith handed down by the Church is in fact identical with the teaching of Scripture, and is confirmed by it.

At this point we may observe in passing that the body of revealed truths which depend upon this primary degree of authority, which are at once delivered by the Church and corroborated by the testimony of Scripture,

<sup>1</sup> See Palmer, l. c.

<sup>2</sup> Pusey, *Eirenicon*, p. 213. Palmer even claims the Council of Trent in favour of the sixth Article (l. c.). See below.

is smaller than is sometimes supposed ; and further, there is undoubtedly a difference in the degree of practical prominence assigned to particular doctrines in the Bible and in the writings of the Fathers. In other words, doctrines do not by any means stand all on one level ; while some are set forth as most essential, others seem to be insisted on less emphatically. S. Cyril of Jerusalem says expressly that the Creeds were framed in such wise as to embrace the "most essential" or "distinctive" doctrines (τὰ καριώτατα) of Scripture<sup>1</sup>. And it is well to recollect that while the disputes of Christendom have been mainly concerned with points of doctrine secondary in importance, there has been a most impressive degree of unanimity in regard to the central doctrines of our faith. The caution must also be added that what has been already said must be limited strictly to matters of *faith*. In regard to rites, ceremonies, usages, institutions, the office of the Church is obviously more extensive. A large discretion has ever been allowed to particular Churches in regard to traditions and ceremonies, which as the thirty-fourth Article

<sup>1</sup> *Catech.* v. 12.

says, "at all times have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word." Scripture, in fact, appears to sanction a power of regulating externals, provided that no rite or discipline be actually contrary to Scripture<sup>1</sup>. The distinction between a tradition of doctrines, and a tradition in regard to ecclesiastical usages, must be carefully borne in mind if we are to avoid troublesome confusion, and to measure accurately the degree of divergence which exists between different branches of the Catholic Church.

3. We pass to a third, and happily undisputed, function of Scripture. The Church sends her children to the Bible in order that they may there find nourishment for the spiritual life. Religion means the life of friendship between God and man, and the Bible is in great part the story of that friendship. It records the spiritual conflicts and experiences of men who believed themselves to be called into the life of divine fellowship, and strove to rise to its requirements. Scripture may be regarded,

<sup>1</sup> Note B.



from this point of view, as a manual of spiritual instruction and devotion; and in her service-books the Church seems to recognize a threefold method of using the Bible for this purpose. The daily lessons appointed to be read in church cover a somewhat large portion of Holy Writ. The reading of them serves to impress on the hearer's mind some general truths relating to God's judgments, and the laws of His moral government. It deepens the sense of His continuous converse with mankind, of His providential care, of His unchanging purpose of grace. In reciting the Epistles and Gospels on the other hand the Church seems to commend to us the duty of devout meditation on short and pregnant passages of Holy Writ; she sets before us some incident in the life of our Lord, some deep utterance, some work of power, which illustrates the laws of God's kingdom and the methods of His redemptive action. Once more, in the Psalms she gives us a manual of personal devotion. She puts the Psalms into our hands in order to train us to think the thoughts and utter the language of love. She teaches us how God should be approached and adored, and what He is to the individual

soul that seeks Him—its refuge, its strong rock, its hiding-place, the satisfaction of its thirst, the supreme object of its devotion and love. The Psalms in every generation have supplied the children of God with words which they may take with them<sup>1</sup> to the throne of grace, and in which they may find utterance for all the varied moods and phases of the spiritual life—penitence, contrition, fear, adoration, joy, self-surrender, exultation, thanksgiving, praise. Thus, speaking generally, a threefold use of Scripture seems to be encouraged and sanctioned by the Church<sup>2</sup>. For she looks on the Bible committed to her care as the food of souls, as “milk” or “strong meat” according to the capacity of him who feeds upon it<sup>3</sup>. S. Chrysostom compares Holy Scripture in this aspect to a garden or fair pasture, where the soul may range at will. “Many and various,” he says, “as in a meadow, are the flowers that I can observe in the lection which has been read to us; many the rose-bushes, many the violets, nor less numerous the lilies than they; aye, scattered

<sup>1</sup> Hosea xiv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> I owe this suggestion to a sermon by Professor Lock.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. v. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 2.

too on every side in diversified abundance, the fruits of the Spirit, and sweet the fragrance of their odour. Or rather, it is no mere meadow, but even a paradise [that one finds] in the reading of the divine Scriptures. For it is not bare perfume only that these flowers yield, but fruit also, adapted for nourishing the soul<sup>1</sup>." "Pleasant is the meadow," he elsewhere says<sup>2</sup>, "pleasant is the garden, but far more pleasant the reading of the Scriptures. For there indeed you have the flowers that bloom to die; but here thoughts born to live. There the zephyr blows; but here we have the breathing of the Spirit. There you hear the chirping of the grasshoppers; but here the melody of the prophets. There pleasure is enjoyed in the seeing; here profit in the reading. The garden is confined to one spot; the Scriptures are in all parts of the world. The garden is subject to the inevitable influence of the seasons; the Scriptures both in winter and in summer are fair in their foliage, plentiful in their fruit."

Thus to the true children of God the Bible is a celestial treasury of all medicines profitable for the health of the soul; a necessary

<sup>1</sup> *Opera*, tom. ii, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* tom. iii, p. 386.

aid to the growth of Christian character, a fountain of grace, an unfailing source of comfort, healing, and light. And indeed no critical conclusions can ever really impair or undermine this spiritual function of the Bible. It is, and ever will be, what Chrysostom in glowing words describes it to be, "an unruffled haven, an impregnable fortress, a tower that cannot be moved, a glory which none can take from us, armour impenetrable to the foe, a source of courage that will not shrink, pleasure for evermore, and everything excellent that one could name<sup>1</sup>."

4. Once more, the Church sends us to the Bible in order that we may find Jesus Christ. "The key that lets men into the Scriptures," says Archbishop Laud, "is the tradition of the Church; but when they are in, they hear Christ Himself immediately speaking in Scripture to the faithful, and 'His sheep' do not only 'hear' but know 'His voice'<sup>2</sup>." The

<sup>1</sup> *Op. tom. v, p. 519.*

<sup>2</sup> *Conf. with Fisher, § 16 (Works, vol. 2, p. 115).* A Roman Catholic writer quoted by Laud says that, like the Samaritans, who first heard the report of the Samaritan woman and then heard Christ themselves (S. John iv. 42), "sic certe fidelis, sacra scriptura cognita, et in ipsa Christo intento, plus verbis Christi in ea credit quam cuicunque prædicatori, quam etiam ecclesiae testificanti," etc.

Gospels especially have the peculiar merit of bringing the soul into contact with a personality. "The Church," says Dr. Mozley in his essay on Blanco White, "receives with humble faith all these that the froward reason calls legends, and recites them in regular liturgical order to her children as the simple truth, the history of what has been upon this earth. Blessed privilege to hear them! amidst a jarring world those disclosures of the supernatural strike deep into the heart that wants to realize God's presence. There He is; He lives and moves as a real God; He loves and concerns Himself for His creatures; He breaks forth from the veil of nature, and uncovers Himself to us. Every day we hear those Gospels which tell us what He did when He lived upon this earth—His compassions and divine sweetness, His humility and majesty supreme in mortal shape. What untold depths lie in those simple accounts which the evangelists have written, and in those acts of pity to the blind, the lame, the deaf, the dumb, the sick, the dying, and the dead. What an image do they raise in our minds of our blessed Lord in His earthly form! Great privilege indeed to hear these holy narratives read! May they go on

forming and deepening an image of Him which will stay in us and never go away<sup>1</sup>! And what is true of the Gospels is in due measure and degree true of the other parts of Scripture. The Old Testament indeed testifies of Christ; He is present there by His Spirit. In type and prophecy, in narrative and song, in ordinance and precept, in proverb and saw, the Old Testament witnesses to Him, points to Him, looks for Him. But in the New Testament, and especially in the Gospels, we seem almost with the bodily eyes to behold Him moving to and fro among men, in His majesty and His meekness, in His heavenly repose and His beneficent activity. The Gospels seem, to use the vivid expression of S. Paul, almost to "placard" Jesus Christ visibly before us<sup>2</sup>. In devout study of them the benediction of a Divine presence makes itself felt. "Thy holy Scripture," cries Henri Perréyve, "is another eucharist! Thou art living, Thou art present in the sacred pages, in each word of Thy Scriptures, as in the tabernacle<sup>3</sup>!"

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, vol. ii, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Méditations sur les saints ordres*, p. 27. Erasmus in the preface to his edition of the N. T. (1516), (quoted by Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the original Greek*)

## III.

So far we have been concerned with the general principles on which the Bible is used in the Church; but in order to have any degree of completeness, the treatment of our subject must include some reference to the views which prevail in different communions as to the relation in which the Bible stands to the tradition of the Church. The view which the English Church adopts in her Articles is, as we believe, the immemorial doctrine of Christendom. In a Canon of Convocation, which directs the clergy to subscribe the Articles, the English Church bids her preachers be careful "that they never teach aught in a sermon to be religiously held and believed by the people except what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments, and what the Catholic fathers and ancient bishops have collected from that same doctrine." The sixth Article declares that Holy Scripture "containeth all things necessary to salvation." The Church accordingly rejects all doctrines

says: "They [the N. T. scriptures] reproduce a living image of that most sacred mind [of Christ], and in such wise present Christ Himself speaking, healing, dying, rising again, indeed in His entirety, that He would even be less visible if we actually saw Him before our eyes."

that are repugnant to Scripture; and all things which cannot be proved from Scripture, either by express statement, or by way of inference, she excludes from the substance of necessary faith. "All articles of faith," in short, "are proved by Scripture, and by a universal tradition establishing the right interpretation, and corroborating the testimony of Scripture<sup>1</sup>." Any addition therefore to the *substance* of the Church's faith is impossible. The catholic Faith is a deposit once for all committed to the Church. There can be illumination of the Church's consciousness, elucidation and development of her terminology, there can be wider and deeper insight into the infinite significance of her creed; but there can be no addition to the body of truth once revealed. "The apostles," says Irenaeus, "poured into the Church as into a rich treasure-house all that pertains to truth<sup>2</sup>."

i. The view of our brethren in the Roman Church, at any rate as sometimes held and taught nowadays, differs from the above view in that it places tradition and Scripture on a level as independent sources of truth.

<sup>1</sup> Palmer, *Treatise on the Church*, pt. iii, c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Iren., *adv. Haer.* iii. 4. 1.



The decree of Trent declares that the "truth and discipline (of the Gospel) is contained in written books and in unwritten traditions, which, having been received by the apostles from Christ's own mouth, or by the apostles themselves at the dictation of the Holy Ghost, have been transmitted as if from hand to hand, and have reached us. [The synod] following the examples of the orthodox fathers, receives and venerates with an equal feeling of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament, since one God is the author of each; and also the traditions themselves, relating both to faith and morals, as having been orally dictated by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved by a continuous succession in the Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>."

This Canon as it stands does not necessarily do more than reassert what we have seen to be the ancient view, if it be conceded that the traditions "confirm and are identically the same with the doctrines of Scripture<sup>2</sup>." But in view of the difficulty which some Roman Catholic writers evidently feel in reconciling certain newly defined dogmas

<sup>1</sup> Sess. iv.

<sup>2</sup> Palmer, l. c.

with the faith of the early Church, there has undoubtedly been a tendency to expand the definition of Trent in the direction of making tradition an independent authority in matters of *faith*. Thus a modern Romanist would practically agree with Dr. Wiseman when he says, "Tradition, or *the doctrines* delivered down and the *unwritten Word of God* are one and the same thing. . . . By the *unwritten Word of God* we mean a *body of doctrines*, which, in consequence of express declarations in the written Word, we believe not to have been committed to writing, but delivered by Christ to His apostles, and by the apostles to their successors<sup>1</sup>." This, if words mean anything, implies that there are not only points of usage, and institutions, but also *points of faith, doctrines*, which are

<sup>1</sup> Wiseman, *Lectures on the Principal Doctrines and Practices of the Catholic Church* (London, 1836), vol. i, pp. 60, 61. On the other hand, contrast the declaration of Cassander, quoted by Palmer, l. c. p. 15. "This tradition is *nothing else but the explanation and interpretation of Scripture itself*, so that it might be not improperly said, that Scripture is a sort of tradition folded and sealed, and tradition is scripture unfolded and unsealed." Cp. Hawkins, *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 317 f. In illustration of the modern Roman position, see Card. Franzelin, quoted by Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 58; and cp. Gore, *Bampton Lectures*, note 25, p. 252.

not contained in Scripture, but are handed down by unwritten tradition from the apostles. I am not concerned to press this point in a controversial spirit; but it is only fair to remark that there is a discrepancy between earlier and later expositions of the Tridentine rule,—later writers inclining at any rate to the position that Scripture is only one, though certainly a chief source of Catholic truth, and that an article of faith may rest on the tradition of the Church alone, or even on the definition of the Pope. "In matters of dogma," says Father Clarke, "she (the Church) cannot change one iota of the faith once delivered to the saints." So far this statement accords with the well-known rule of S. Vincent of Lerins, in the twenty-third chapter of his *Commonitorium*; but what follows? "Or (i.e. nor can the Church) reverse a doctrine once defined by the infallible voice of the supreme pontiff<sup>1</sup>." On this statement I have no wish to comment, beyond observing that the two clauses would seem to involve an extreme inconsistency. On the other hand, it might be

<sup>1</sup> Clarke, *The Pope and the Bible*, p. 53. On the inconsistency of the Roman position, see Palmer, l. c. p. 17 f.

contended that the Roman Church has not authoritatively endorsed this interpretation of the Tridentine decree, which at present must be ranked as an opinion maintained by some Romanist writers<sup>1</sup>. The Roman Church would not seem to be officially committed to the view that Scripture contains only a portion of the Catholic faith ; but certainly this seems to be the opinion of some modern Romanist writers.

With three brief remarks, however, we must leave this portion of our subject :

(1) The modern view of tradition as an independent source of doctrinal truth closely corresponds with a tendency challenged by Bishop Andrewes in the seventeenth century, —the tendency to enlarge the area of what is *de fide*. To Andrewes it appeared that the Roman controversialists of his day were lacking in the sense of proportion. Bellarmine, for instance, refused the title "Catholic" to King James I, on the ground that he disputed such minor points of belief or practice as the invocation of saints, transubstantiation, and

<sup>1</sup> The fact appears to be that there is a real inconsistency between earlier Roman statements on tradition (see Palmer, l. c.), and the view of writers like Dr. Wiseman, or Card. Franzelin.

the temporal claims of the Papacy. Andrewes, with a more just historical sense, was at pains to distinguish between what was certainly and clearly *de fide*, and what was merely probable, or allowable, as matter of opinion, or even of sentiment. It was a necessary and vital distinction,—never more important to bear in mind than at this moment, when the whole question of reunion is under consideration. We English churchmen are at one with the ancient Church in being rightly jealous of any innovation in, or addition to, the creed of Christendom.

(2) The modern Roman view is shown to be unsatisfying by the fact that there has hitherto been hesitation in boldly acting upon it. In spite of the theoretical equality of rank assigned to Scripture and unwritten tradition as sources of doctrinal truth, Roman theologians have frequently betrayed anxiety to prove points both of doctrine and discipline from Scripture alone. Thus, while Bossuet objected to the temporal supremacy of the Pope as non-scriptural, Milner endeavours to find scriptural warrant for the Invocation of Saints<sup>1</sup>; and Dr. Wiseman attempts to

<sup>1</sup> Palmer, l. c. pp. 16, 17.

discover support in the Bible for other controverted points, such as the granting of indulgences, and the honour due to relics<sup>1</sup>.

(3) On the other hand, we cannot but observe that the tendency to exalt tradition coincides with a widespread disregard of Scripture—a practical discouragement of the laity from searching the Scriptures for themselves. I knew that individual Romanist writers have, much to their honour, spoken earnestly of the duty of biblical study; it is indeed expressly stated by Father Clarke that “the authorities of the [Roman] Catholic Church—Pope, bishops, and clergy—are anxious to see the Scriptures widely circulated among the people<sup>2</sup>.” But the facts of the case seem to point to a very different conclusion. Those who had any opportunity of reading the remarkable preface of M. Henri Lasserre to his translation of the Four Gospels into French, will remember his acknowledgement that the great mass of Roman Catholic lay-people are profoundly ignorant of Scripture<sup>3</sup>. This general ignorance I refer

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Wiseman's *Lectures* (already cited), vol. ii, pp. 73, 102, 103, 129 f. (referred to by Hawkins, l. c. p. 30).

<sup>2</sup> See *The Pope and the Bible*, a pamphlet by R. F. Clarke, S.J., p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Note C.

to as an undeniable fact, without pausing to point out all its consequences. I will only say that under such circumstances there is no safeguard, such as there would be if the study of Scripture were generally encouraged in the Church of Rome, against unscriptural doctrine being taught and accepted within her pale; and as we have seen, the unanimous voice of antiquity declares that a doctrine which is unscriptural is *ipso facto* excluded from the area of what is *de fide*. In fact the word "catholic" can only be justly predicated of what is clearly set down in Scripture or has been directly inferred from its express statements by the ancient Church.

ii. Another view of Scripture which we ought briefly to consider is summarily expressed in the celebrated declaration of William Chillingworth (b. 1602; d. 1644), "The Bible, I say, the Bible only is the religion of Protestants<sup>1</sup>"; or in the position which we sometimes hear defended, that "each individual ought to examine Scripture for himself before he believes any doctrine." Now of course Scripture might suffice to be the primary teacher of the Catholic faith if it had certain qualifica-

<sup>1</sup> *Religion of Protestants*, I. vi. 56.

tions which it conspicuously, and happily, lacks. There has been at times a tendency among Protestant theologians to regard revelation mainly as a definite and ascertainable system or body of doctrines; and certainly if Scripture had the formal precision, the definiteness or clearness of a *system*, it might well serve as a primary teacher. When, however, Protestant writers praise the "clearness" of Scripture, one feels inclined to protest against the readiness with which without intending it men "talk deceitfully for God<sup>1</sup>." For Scripture knows nothing of formal system. On the contrary, its principal value lies in the unsystematic and occasional form of its different books. "The actual form of the Scriptures," says Dr. Hawkins, "by its very indirectness, want of system, and apparent adaptation to local and temporary circumstances, tends to a variety of important moral results; awakening attention, stimulating curiosity, promoting research, rewarding diligence, humility, reverence, and conducing to the growth and strength not of mere belief, but of a genuine religious faith<sup>2</sup>." If, we may ask, the Bible has the character mistak-

<sup>1</sup> See Hawkins, *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 45-48.

<sup>2</sup> Hawkins, l. c. p. 63.



only ascribed to it,—if it be true that “all those things which concern the terms of man’s salvation are delivered with the greatest evidence and perspicuity<sup>1</sup>,” how are we to account for the diversity of doubts, errors, and disputes that have arisen respecting the meaning of particular passages, and what need was there for the careful provision made by apostles for a succession of teachers who might give continuous oral instruction in every Church? In every instance where the Gospel was planted, a society was also established; teachers were appointed, and ministers of the Word whose express function was *to give attendance to reading, exhortation, doctrine, to preach the Word, to be apt to teach, to labour in the Word and doctrine, to be ministers of the new covenant, ministers of the Gospel*<sup>2</sup>. It is surely needless to enlarge on this point. The doctrine that “the Bible only is the religion of Protestants” is based on a fundamental misconception of the nature of Holy Writ, nor does it make any allowance for the ignorance, carelessness, prejudice, passion, defective reasoning powers

<sup>1</sup> Stillingfleet, quoted by Hawkins, l. c. p. 322.

<sup>2</sup> Hawkins, l. c. p. 42.

and party spirit of men. An apostolic writer reminds his readers that in S. Paul's epistles there are *some things hard to be understood which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, as S. Vincent very justly says, "The Holy Scripture owing to its very depth is not understood of all men in one and the same sense; its expressions are interpreted by different men in different ways, so that it seems as if almost as many opinions might be extracted from it as there are men"<sup>2</sup>. It is indeed a strange zeal for Scripture that would reject in the search after truth the aid of the Church of Christ. Experience conclusively shows that the student of the Bible needs a clue to guide him if he is to be saved from falling into fantastic errors, if he is not to lose all sense of proportion. This clue is supplied by the "hermeneutical tradition" of the Church. "It is necessary," S. Vincent elsewhere says<sup>3</sup>, "that the faculty of understanding the heavenly Scripture should be

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Common. c. 2.* Father Clarke's pamphlet, already referred to, deals at length with the position implied in Chillingworth's aphorism, in chap. 2, "Popular Bible-reading and common sense." Cp. Hawkins, *ut supra*.

<sup>3</sup> *Common. c. 29.*

directed by the one rule of the ecclesiastical sense, especially in those inquiries on which the foundations of Catholic dogma rest for support." So S. Cyril of Jerusalem instructs his catechumens: "Receive through teaching and authoritative instruction, and hold fast, the one only faith now delivered unto thee by the Church and confirmed by the testimony of the entire Scripture. For since all cannot read the Scriptures, and some are debarred by ignorance, and some by want of leisure, from knowledge of them, lest the soul should perish through ignorance, the clauses in which we comprehend the doctrine of the faith are few in number. . . . For not as it seized the fancy of men were the statements of the Creed compiled, but the most salient points collected from the whole of Scripture make up the doctrine of the faith. Like a grain of mustard-seed this faith in a few sentences has embraced the whole knowledge of godliness contained in the Old and New Testaments. Take heed then and hold fast the traditions which ye are now receiving<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> *Catech.* v. 12.

## IV.

Enough has been said to illustrate the relation in which Scripture stands to the doctrinal and hermeneutical tradition of the Church, and the limits of our present subject have now been reached. It may be well, in conclusion, again to impress upon our minds how limited is the area within which we can be said to possess primary authority, i.e. the testimony of the Bible corroborating that of the Church. The central doctrines of the revealed faith are few in number, though they are great and august in proportion to their fewness. They constitute that solid body of truth which the great mass of Christians hold in common. Such a doctrine is that of our Lord's Divinity—a doctrine received and taught not here or there only, not in this age only or in that, but in "East and West, North and South, throughout all Christendom in every Church, so far as the records of Christianity extend<sup>1</sup>". And it need scarcely be pointed out how impressive is the strength of this consentient testimony. Here at least is one of those truths as to which no man can say that Christendom

<sup>1</sup> Hawkins, l. c. p. 115.

speaks with a divided voice. Then again, outside the range of such central verities as are contained in the Creeds of the Church, lies a department of truth in regard to which it may be said that there is a very strong consensus of Catholic opinion rather than any definite dogma of the Church<sup>1</sup>. Again, there are some subjects in regard to which a certain latitude of opinion has always prevailed, owing to the lack of precise scriptural statements or definitions of the Church<sup>2</sup>. Finally, there are doctrines put forward which not only lack all scriptural warrant but are demonstrably novel; and in regard to these we shall adhere to the rule of S. Vincent, receiving and believing only that which we have ascertained the Catholic Church to have universally held in ancient times<sup>3</sup>.

On the whole, then, we are encouraged to put ourselves under the guidance of the Church so far as it extends; and we must

<sup>1</sup> e.g. the doctrines of the eucharistic presence and sacrifice, or of the Christian ministry. See Gore, *Roman Claims*, pp. 69, 70.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. the nature of the gift received by the faithless communicant, the actual sinlessness, or the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin.

<sup>3</sup> *Common. c.* 20.

be careful not to exaggerate the diversities of teaching which prevail within particular portions of the Church. We do well to endeavour to deepen our sense and practical comprehension of these holy verities which with one mouth and one heart Christendom proclaims: the mystery of the Trinity in Unity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the atoning sacrifice of the Saviour, the work of the Spirit, the one baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, the judgement. By meditation on these revealed mysteries of the faith, we shall at once educate our sense of proportion, and escape from the maze of fruitless controversy, walking steadily and soberly in the revealed paths of peace. Finally, we shall learn to trust practically to that *unction from the Holy One* which rests on Christians; we shall believe that if in anything we be otherwise minded than our brethren *God shall reveal even this* to us<sup>1</sup>, unveiling to us as we are able to bear it the inexhaustible significance of our holy faith, and illuminating for us the Scriptures which enshrine it. "For we have a Lord," S. Chrysostom says, "who loves mankind, and when He sees us anxious,

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iii. 15.

and strongly desirous of understanding the Divine oracles, He doth not leave us destitute of ought besides, but straightway enlightens our understanding, and bestows that illumination that proceeds from Himself, and according to His benign wisdom communicates all true doctrine to our souls<sup>1</sup>". Yes, the means which God has placed within our reach for the attainment of truth are all to be used in combination: we are to hear the Church, and then to diligently search the Scriptures for proof of what she teaches; but above all we are to remember that God will give the *Holy Spirit to them that ask Him*. *We have received*, S. Paul says, *not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Ye have an anointing from the Holy One*, writes S. John, *and ye know all things; . . . and as for you, the anointing which ye received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you. But as His anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true and is no lie, and even as it taught you, abide ye in Him*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Opera*, tom. iv, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> S. Luke xi. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 12; 1 John ii. 20, 27 (marg.).

## NOTE A.

*To the Church the Scriptures belong, etc.*

Tertullian, *de præs. Haer.* xix: "Our appeal must not be made to the Scriptures; nor must controversy be admitted on points in which victory will either be impossible or uncertain, or not certain enough. . . . The natural order of things would require that this point should be first raised, 'To whom does the faith itself properly belong? Whose are the Scriptures? From whom, and through whom, and when, and to whom has been handed down that rule by which men become Christians?' For wherever it shall be made manifest that the true Christian rule and faith exists, there will likewise be the true Scriptures and expositions thereof, and all the Christian traditions."

Augustine, *de moribus Eccl.* lxi, speaks of the Scriptures as "at all times most widely diffused, and guarded by the testimony of the Churches dispersed abroad throughout the whole world." In determining the contents of the Canon, he elsewhere says, "we must follow the authority of the greatest available number of Churches, especially that of Apostolic Sees."

With regard to the actual Canon of Scripture and its contents, see the account given by Bp. Westcott in *The Bible and the Church*. The enlarged Canon adopted by the Synod of Trent includes the apocryphal Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, Judith, the two Books of Maccabees, and the Book of Baruch; the Synod, in the main, follows the Third Council of Carthage (397 A.D.), which, without doubt, was largely influenced by the authority of S. Augustine. The reasons, however, why his authority on this point is not for a moment to be weighed against the testimony of the four preceding



centuries are overwhelmingly strong, but cannot be discussed here.

We receive the Canon on the authority of the Church, and we may observe, "It is no vicious circle to say that Holy Scripture proves the existence of the Church, and that this, the Church, proves Holy Scripture. An ambassador comes to a king bearing his credentials in a letter. He himself is the authority for the genuineness of the letter: when the letter is opened, it is found to define the powers, plenipotentiary or other, of the messenger who brought it. Thus it is with Holy Scripture" (Bp. Forbes, *Explanation of the XXXIX Articles*, p. 93). The same illustration is given by Dr. Wiseman, *Lectures on the Principal Doctrines and Practices of the Catholic Church*, vol. i, lect. 3.

It has sometimes been contended that a passage of S. Basil (*de Spir. Sancto*, c. lxvi.) recognizes the equal authority of unwritten tradition and Scripture. But (1) the illustrations given by Basil are all taken from points of *practice, usage, and discipline*, the word *δὲγματα* evidently meaning ordinances and usages, not doctrines. (2) S. Basil himself expressly teaches elsewhere that in matters of faith the appeal to Scripture is the ultimate test or criterion. Thus he says, "It is a manifest defection from the faith, and a proof of arrogance, either to reject anything of what is written, or to introduce anything that is not" (*de Fide*, c. i.); and again, "Believe those things which are written; the things which are not written seek not" (*Hom. xxix. adv. calumn. S. Trin.*). To these may be added a passage from the *de Spiritu Sancto* itself, c. xvi. S. Basil is speaking of the co-equal honour and glory due to the Father and the Son, as a point taught by "the Fathers." He continues: "But this is not sufficient for us, that it is the tradition of the Fathers. For even they followed the mind (*βουλήματι*) of the Scripture, taking their first principles (or premisses) from the passages which a short while ago we set before you from Scripture."

## NOTE B.

On tradition as a rule of usages and rites, see Palmer, *Treatise on the Church*, part iii, ch. 4. The "tradition" is in fact threefold: (a) A rule of faith and doctrine, such as the doctrine of Christ's Divinity, the doctrine of grace, etc. These and other doctrines, which are taught by the Church and corroborated by Scripture, are therefore *de fide*. (b) A rule of interpretation (hermeneutical tradition). (c) A rule respecting rites and ceremonies. Tertullian, *de cer. Mil.* iii, mentions certain ceremonies in baptism, times of receiving the Holy Communion, the observance of Sunday, and the use of the sign of the cross, as instances of traditional usages. S. Basil of Caesarea, in the passage *de Spir. Sancto*, c. lxvi, ascribes to tradition the words of invocation (*ἐπίκλησις*) used before the consecration of the elements. The freedom recognized by our Thirty-fourth Article is admirably illustrated by the injunction given by Pope Gregory the Great to Augustine: "Ex singulis ergo quibusque ecclesiis, quae pia, quae religiosa, quae recta sunt elige, et haec quasi in fasciculum collecta apud Anglorum mentes in consuetudinem deponere" (Bede, *Hist. Eccl.* ii. 27, quoted by Maclear, *Introduction to the Articles*, p. 383, note 2). See generally Hawkins' *Bampton Lectures*, No. 5.

## NOTE C.

*Roman Catholic lay-people and Scripture.*

M. Lasserre says: "The greater part of the children of the Church only know fragments of the sacred volume, reproduced in no logical or chronological order in prayer-books and in the Mass for Sundays and feasts; and they scarcely retain anything from it except special quotations which are met with more often than others

in sermons and pious books, and end by taking possession, whether they wish it or not, of the memory of all, and so to say become public property" (*Preface*, p. ii). Cp. Gore's *Roman Catholic Claims*, pp. 10 and 11.

A defence of the great restrictions under which lay-people are allowed to read Scripture is given by Father Clarke in his pamphlet *The Pope and the Bible*, chap. 2.

A notice of this tract appears in *The Church and Synagogue* for Oct. 1896, in which it is stated that "Mr. Ottley quietly assumes, without any further discussion, that by 'Bible' is meant the Canonical Books of the New Testament, or as he calls them 'the Christian Scriptures'."

It is necessary perhaps to explain that the phrase "Christian Bible" (p. 11) was meant to convey the idea that the Old Testament gained a new character from its reception by the Christian Church. The full significance of the Old Testament was gradually elucidated "under the guidance of apostolic men, who before they finally disappeared had written the books of the New Testament" (*Church and Synagogue*, p. 37). The "Bible" in the Christian sense of the term would accordingly mean *the Old Testament accompanied and elucidated by the New Testament*; in this sense the Church is certainly prior to the Bible. There is a passage in Irenaeus (*Haer.* iv. 26. 1, ed. Stieren) which describes the new character given to the Old Testament by the New as follows: ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων μὲν ἀναγινωσκόμενος ὁ νόμος ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, μύθῳ ἔοικεν· οὐ γὰρ ἔχουσι τὴν ἐξήγησιν τῶν πάντων, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἡ κατ' ἀνθρώπων παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ· ὑπὸ δὲ χριστιανῶν ἀναγινωσκόμενος θησαυρὸς ἐστὶ, κεκρυμμένος μὲν ἐν ἀγρῷ, αὐτοῖς δὲ ἀποκεκαλυμμένος. Cp. Origen, in *Num.* hom. ix. 4: "Nobis autem, qui eam [legem] spiritaliter et evangelico sensu intelligimus et exponimus, semper nova est et *utrumque nobis novum Testamentum est*, non temporis novitate sed intelligentiae novitate."

**X.**

**THE TEACHING POWER OF  
THE CHURCH**

**R**



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PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY  
AT KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

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## **X.**

# *The Teaching Power of the Church.*

BY THE

REV. W. E. COLLINS, M.A.,

PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY AT KING'S COLLEGE,  
LONDON.

SEVENTH THOUSAND.

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# SUMMARY.

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# THE TEACHING POWER OF THE CHURCH.

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Ἡμεῖς μάρτυρες τοῦτον.—S. Luke xxiv. 48.

WE have to-day to deal more particularly with the teaching power of the Church. It will be granted on all hands that it is the divinely appointed function of the Church to teach: but many questions still remain to be asked with regard to the nature of this *magisterium* or teaching power. What are its limitations? its safeguards? How can we be sure of its authenticity? Above all, how is it expressed? Now, some of these questions will be dealt with in the lectures which follow. To-morrow, for instance, the *magisterium* of the *Ecclesia diffusa* will be considered; and it will be shown that the episcopate throughout the world forms the normal organ of the Church's teaching power. The following lecture will deal with the authority of General Councils, i.e. the *magisterium* of the *Ecclesia congregata*; and the last will be concerned with the claims which have



been put forth on behalf of the Bishop of Rome (and exercised by him) to speak in the name of the whole Church—i.e. it will deal with the usurped *magisterium* of the Pope. It may be that this method of studying the subject will involve some slight amount of repetition; but this will be amply compensated for if the result be to place in clearer light the fundamental bearings of the whole question, by insisting and re-insisting upon them<sup>1</sup>.

To-day, then, we are concerned more particularly with the nature of this teaching authority—this *magisterium*—in itself, apart from the particular manner in which it may happen to be expressed.

<sup>1</sup> "I have no doubt that both in these lectures and elsewhere many things will be found which have been already said both by myself and by other writers. Probably many things will be found which both myself and other writers may find occasion to say again, as often as it may be needful to put forth correct views of matters about which popular errors and confusions are afloat. There is a large class of persons who pay little heed to a thing which is said only once, but on whom, when it is said several times, and put in several shapes, it has at last an effect. I believe that this class is more numerous—its needs are certainly better worth attending to—than those fastidious persons who are disgusted if they are ever called upon to hear the same thing twice" (Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, page v).

## I.

And first, if it be asked *what* it is that the Church is to teach, there can be no doubt as to the answer. She is to teach Christ—to bring men into contact with Christ, and to communicate to them the benefits of membership in Him. She represents Him to the world. He has ascended to the Father, yet in the Church He is still present. And the things which in the flesh “He began both to do and teach<sup>1</sup>,” He is now bringing to their consummation in and through the Church. From this point of view, then, her function is clear: she is here in order that the verities of the faith should not be obscured in course of time, either by the suppression of some fundamental parts, or by the accretions of falsehood. She has to “guard the deposit<sup>2</sup>.” This is obviously a very necessary function. For if we think of any historical religion, we shall see that it is liable to change—either by accretion or deterioration—in course of time. Unpalatable truths may be ignored or forgotten; effete ideas may be gradually discarded. Or on the other hand some new teacher may arise and modify the earlier

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 1.<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 20.

teaching; or new and foreign elements may be grafted upon the original stock, until its character is changed entirely.

Now with Christianity no such change is possible: it claims to be not only historical but absolute. *We* do not "look for another<sup>1</sup>." Our faith is not a body of partial truths, suited to the present immature state of the human race. It is not merely a "tentative solution," a "fragmentary revelation," or a "revelation of the soul's wants," like the pre-Christian religions. Christianity claims to be the absolute religion. "It claims on the one side to be bound by no limits of place or time, or faculty or object, but to deal with the whole sum of being, and with the whole of each separate existence. It claims on the other side to give its revelation in facts which are an actual part of human experience<sup>2</sup>." And so it follows that no such alteration of the substance of the Christian faith is possible; and that in proportion as changes are introduced, the resulting product ceases to be Christianity. There is in our faith no element which can become effete and drop off; no element is lacking

<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott, *Gospel of Life*, p. 228.

which later ages can supply. The Christian Church must "guard the deposit." Other systems—the Buddhist religion, or the Wesleyan Society, or the Benedictine Order—are in no sense bound to adhere strictly to the teaching of their founders; for the founder is but the teacher of certain truths external to himself. And others may quite legitimately, and without disloyalty, supplement this teaching out of any fuller knowledge which they may possess; indeed, in proportion as they do so they will be loyal to his spirit. But not so with the Church. Her Founder is Himself the Way in which she is to walk: He is Himself the Truth which she exists to teach; He is Himself the Life by which she lives<sup>1</sup>. To add to or subtract from His teaching would be treason: it would be the destruction of her very existence as the Church of Christ.

Every churchman is aware that this is the teaching of Holy Scripture upon the subject. (a) There can be no introduction of foreign elements. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>," says S. Paul to the Corinthians. He writes

<sup>1</sup> S. John xiv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 11.

to them again, fearing that they may be "corrupted from the simplicity and purity which is towards Jesus," if any coming to them should "preach another Jesus," or if they should receive "a different spirit," or "a different gospel<sup>1</sup>." To the Galatians he writes, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema<sup>2</sup>." (b) Nor can there be any further revelation: there is nothing analagous to the progressive covenant-revelations to the Hebrews. S. Timothy is to "keep the deposit which is committed to him<sup>3</sup>;" and the Christian people are exhorted to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints<sup>4</sup>." In short, "it is of the very essence of the Christian revelation that as originally given it is final<sup>5</sup>." The office of the Church, from this point of view, is to dissipate the obstacles of time and space and circumstance which separate us from our Lord's own teaching, to keep us face to face with the facts as

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 3, 4, R.V.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 8.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Jude 3. Cf. 2 John 2.

<sup>5</sup> Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 38.

facts, and enable us more and more to realize their significance. The divinely appointed teacher can only teach that faith which she taught from the beginning. She cannot modify that which she teaches, for from the beginning that which was committed to her was the whole truth. And she is bound to carry it on from age to age, without accretion, without loss.

## II.

In other words, the teaching office of the Church is primarily that of *witness*. It is not her function to *reveal* truth; but her very existence is bound up with the fact that she is, like her Lord<sup>1</sup>, a faithful Witness. Witness to the faith once delivered is not only her positive duty but the very condition of her being. It is by this constant witness by means of Creeds and Liturgies, of the Christian Ministry, of parents and teachers, that the young are built up in the faith, and the life of the Church carried on from age to age. "The Church," says an English writer, "is a society in which, by the divine institution,

<sup>1</sup> Rev. i. 5.

a great and complicated system of instruction is always to continue<sup>1</sup>." And this continuity of teaching is of no less moment than continuity of organization. "The apostles' doctrine" goes hand in hand with "the apostles' fellowship<sup>2</sup>." There is an apostolical succession of doctrine as well as of ministry. So when Tertullian is dealing with the heretics of his day, he demands that they shall unfold the roll of their bishops, "whom, as having been appointed to their episcopate by the apostles, they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed<sup>3</sup>." But, he continues, even this by itself is not enough. "For their very doctrine, being compared with that of the apostles, will declare by its own diversity and contrariety that it had for its author neither an apostle nor an apostolic man," since apostolical Churches, whatever the date of their foundation, are known by "kinship of doctrine<sup>4</sup>."

The Church, then, cannot reveal new truth; and, on the other hand, she has an unfailing

<sup>1</sup> Palmer, *Church of Christ*, vol. II, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Tert. *De Praescr.* 32: "quos ab apostolis in episcopatum constitutos apostolici seminis traduces habeant."

<sup>4</sup> "Pro consanguinitate doctrinae."

touchstone by which to test the truth of any doctrine which may become current. That which is novel, or local, or partial, cannot be true. Her writers are never tired of declaring the fact. The early manual known as the *Teaching of the Apostles* reveals to us a very immature phase of Christian life, but declares clearly enough that a prophet who brings new doctrine is not to be received<sup>1</sup>. "Therefore it is necessary," says S. Irenaeus, "that we who are in the Church should listen to the elders of the Church, those who, as we have shown, have the succession from the apostles; who together with the succession of the episcopate have received the sure gift of the truth according to the Father's will<sup>2</sup>." S. Athanasius is never tired of pointing out that the Arian heresy is a novelty of his own day, and taunts its followers with dating their brand-new creeds, in order to mark when it was that they believed so-and-so. And he con-

<sup>1</sup> c. II: ἐὰν δὲ αὐτὸς ὁ διδάσκων στροφεῖς διδασκῇ ἄλλην διδαχὴν εἰς τὸ καταλῦσαι, μὴ αὐτοῦ ἀκούσῃτε.

<sup>2</sup> S. Iren. *Adv. Haer.* iv. 26: Quapropter eis qui in Ecclesia sunt, presbyteris obaudire oportet, his qui successionem habent ab apostolis, sicut ostendimus; qui cum episcopatus successione charisma veritatis certum, secundum placitum Patris acceperunt.



trasts with their conduct that of the Council of Nicaea, which legislated concerning discipline, but simply declared the faith: "without prefixing consulate, month, and day, they wrote concerning Easter, 'It seemed good as follows;' for it did then seem good that there should be a general compliance in this matter. But concerning the faith they wrote not 'It seemed good,' but 'Thus believes the Catholic Church;' and thereupon they confessed how they believed, in order to show that their own sentiments were not novel but apostolical; and what they wrote down was no discovery of theirs, but is the same as was taught by the apostles<sup>1</sup>." The famous *Commonitorium* of S. Vincent of Lerins is to the same effect: "We within the Catholic Church are to take great care, that we hold that which hath been believed, everywhere, always, and by all men. . . . And that we shall do if we follow Universality, Antiquity, and Consensus. Universality we shall follow if we confess that one faith to be true which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; Antiquity, if we depart in no wise from those truths which it is plain that our holy forefathers held; and Consensus, if in this antiquity it-

<sup>1</sup> S. Ath. *de Synodis*, § 5.

self we follow the definitions and sentences of all, or practically all, the priests and doctors together<sup>1</sup>." And so, if some new infection of heresy shall threaten to defile even the whole Church, then a Catholic Christian must "take care that he adheres to antiquity, which cannot possibly now be seduced by any deception of novelty<sup>2</sup>." But it is needless to multiply illustrations of a principle which has been at all times accepted—a principle which was set before themselves by the reformers of the sixteenth century, by Luther and Cranmer and Jewel, however deplorably they may have failed in their application of it in particular cases; a principle which is held and recognized, in theory if not in fact, throughout the whole Catholic Church.

Two kinds of indirect testimony are, however, worth noticing:

(1) Innovators upon the faith have generally tried to bolster up their novelties by making for them a fictitious claim to antiquity. Thus the Gnostics, and others who improved upon the Christian revelation, often claimed<sup>3</sup> that their peculiar tenets were a "hidden wisdom" which

<sup>1</sup> S. Vincent. *Commonitorium*, c. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. c. 3.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. S. Irenæus *adv. Hæc.* iii. 2.

had always been held amongst "them that were perfect." Thus, when Popes first presumed to speak in the name of the whole Church on doubtful points, they at least claimed that these oracular utterances were based upon secret stores of divine truth which had been handed down<sup>1</sup>. And the doctrinal accretions of the middle ages were commonly believed to be based upon secret primitive tradition; which tradition in turn was looked upon, not as a concurrent but an independent witness to the truth. Of course, if they had but known it, any such claim had been refuted in advance by Tertullian, who maintained against the heretics of his day, with convincing force, that there was and could be no such secret element in the Christian Gospel<sup>2</sup>. He points out that S. Timothy is to teach the things which he heard, not secretly, but "in the presence of many witnesses"<sup>3</sup>; that the Lord's

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Langen, *Geschichte der römischen Kirche*, vol. I, pp. 737-8; Gieseler, *Church History*, vol. I, pp. 435, 451; Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>2</sup> Tert. *De Præscr.* xxv-xxvii. Cf. S. Iren. *ut supr.*; and the other writers quoted, e.g. in Jeremy Taylor, *Dissuasive from Popery*, Part I, Book I, Sections 2, 3; and Browne, *Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles*, Art. vi, § 1.

<sup>3</sup> "Coram multis testibus," 2 Tim. ii. 2 (*διὰ πολλῶν μαρτύρων*).

own teaching was open, "without a sign of any hidden mystery"<sup>1</sup>; and that time after time He had commanded them to publish what they heard. He used to tell them that a candle is not pushed away under a bushel, but placed on a candlestick, so as to give light to all that are in the house. And these things, Tertullian concludes, the apostles either neglected or failed to understand if they disobeyed them by concealing any portion of the light.

(2) The second indirect testimony to our principle is this: If we think of the Church's greatest teachers of later days, we shall invariably find that they are those who lead us back to the well of primitive truth. It has been well said that real progress in natural science means a fuller realization of Newton's great principles; that progress in philosophy means "Back to Kant," and in politics "Back to Aristotle."<sup>2</sup> It is true in a far deeper sense of theology that all progress is a return to the first principles and a deeper realization of them<sup>3</sup>. And every great teacher,

<sup>1</sup> "Sine ulla significatione alicuius taciti sacramenti."

<sup>2</sup> Pollock, *History of the Science of Politics*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Herder's teaching: "Study the sources; back to the original documents." (Quoted by Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 200.)

however original he may seem, realizes this clearly. "I have affirmed continually," wrote Frederick Denison Maurice, "that I have discovered nothing; that what I am saying is to be found in every creed of the Christian Church<sup>1</sup>"; and he was right.

I have already said, and the fact must never be forgotten, that the Roman Church is quite definitely committed to the same principle—that the Church cannot reveal new articles of faith. Thus Cardinal Newman wrote, "Every Catholic holds that the Christian dogmas were in the Church from the time of the Apostles<sup>2</sup>." Thus Father Clarke says that the Church "cannot change one iota of the faith once delivered to the saints<sup>3</sup>." And, indeed, it is stated in the very constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, by which the Infallibility was promulgated: "For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter in order that, by His revelation, they might publish any new doctrine, but that, He helping them, they might sacredly guard and faithfully expound the deposit of

<sup>1</sup> Maurice, *Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. x.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 37: compare the quotation from Keenan's *Catechism* on p. 38. It has been removed from the last edition of the Catechism.

<sup>3</sup> R. F. Clarke, *The Church and the Bible*, p. 59.

faith<sup>1</sup>." Whether or not this is the view held by most uneducated Roman Catholics may well be doubted by anybody who is acquainted with them even in England; and it is hardly to be wondered at. However, to this principle the Roman Church is committed; here at least we stand upon common ground. And for this very reason it is that our position is one of constant protest against a body of doctrines which we believe to be alien to the original faith, and of constant appeal to history, which alone can prove the fact.

### III.

If it had always been possible to deal with strange opinions at the very time when they first arose, and if men were always willing to submit their speculations to the authority of the Church—"if they would run to prophets, or apostles, or evangelists, instead of to themselves," as Pope Leo the Great says<sup>2</sup>—the Church would have no need to exercise any other function with regard to the faith than that of witness. But unfortunately it

<sup>1</sup> *Pastor Aeternus*, cap. iv. (*Décrets et Canons du Concile Œcuménique*, p. 154, ed. Paris, 1874).

<sup>2</sup> S. Leo. *Ep.* xxviii. 1.

is otherwise. Heresies do not generally arise all of a sudden. As a rule they spring from laying undue emphasis upon some special side of the truth (which haply was somewhat overlooked just before), and pressing it to the neglect of all the rest, and exaggerating it and distorting it until the partial truth becomes total error. By the light of later events it is easy to trace the origins of Arianism earlier than Arius, and of Transubstantiation earlier than Paschasius and his fellows; and other heresies and untenable views in like manner, sometimes to a learned school, sometimes to an unlearned popular opinion. And again, when the heresy does become notorious, its teachers are generally so honestly anxious on behalf of their element of truth, and so desperately in love with the work of their own minds, that they are little ready to submit it to the true touchstone. Consequently, the heresy grows and spreads, and the Church has a further function to perform—that of a judge. In the words of our Article of Religion, “The Church . . . hath authority in controversies of faith<sup>1</sup>.”

In case heresy should arise then, or in case new circumstances should necessitate a decision

<sup>1</sup> Art. xx.

on the part of the Church upon some point touching the faith which has not previously been declared explicitly, it is the function of the Church to judge, not of the individual. We are not concerned at present with the method of this judgement, or its ministers, but with the fact.

So it was in the first days, and so it has been ever since. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that news reached "the apostles and brethren in Judaea" to the effect that "the Gentiles also had received the word of God" (in the person of Cornelius and his household, just baptized by S. Peter). The apostle was called upon by "them of the circumcision" to explain his action; and he did so by showing that it was due to the direct guidance of God. Thereupon (not before, be it observed) the Church ratified the matter with her approval: "When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Acts xi. 1-18. It will be remembered that subsequently the relation of the Gentile converts to the Jewish law was considered and legislated upon by the assembled Church (Acts xv. 1-29). As this was a matter of discipline rather than of faith, it was decided by the



And what was done on this occasion has been done ever since: one question of doctrine after another has arisen and been discussed, and pondered over or wrangled over, until at length, on the basis of already-existing revelation, the Church has spoken—by a council, or by the consent of great doctors, or by the gradual rejection of the false opinion by the general consciousness of the Church. And thereupon her faithful children obey her voice<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in one or other of these ways, the chiliasm of much early teaching died out, and the question of the validity of heretical baptism was settled, and the great heresies were one by one defeated. But it would be useless to multiply instances; for it must be evident to anybody who considers the question that the Church of the living God is the judge in controversies of faith: that she who is the pillar and ground of the truth<sup>2</sup> must be authorized to judge what the truth is, and to separate herself from false teachers.

Church of her own power, on the basis of the previous revelation, and the Prophets. (See verses 7-9, 14-18.)

<sup>1</sup> I am here much indebted to a sermon by the Rev. A. W. Robinson, Warden of All Hallows Barking.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 15. See Palmer, *Church of Christ*, vol. II, pp. 96-102.

But having said this much, we must at once proceed to guard ourselves by explaining what judgement means. It has been pointed out by an English theologian of the seventeenth century that "judgement is of two sorts: the first, of definitive and authentic power; the second, of recognition. The judgement of authentic power, defining what is to be thought of each thing, and prescribing to men's consciences so to think, is proper to God, ... Who ... maketh known unto men what they must think, and persuadeth them what to think<sup>1</sup>." In other words, it is God Who alone is the *source* of right, which exists of Him and because of Him; so that what He judges right is right *ipso facto*, and what He judges wrong is wrong *ipso facto*. Dean Field goes on to say that the judgement of the Church is of necessity of the other kind, of recognition: i.e. the Church judges a doctrine to be true or false because it agrees with or differs from a pre-existing standard of truth—viz. the faith which was in the Church from the beginning.

A little thought will show that this must be so, especially if we consider the function

<sup>1</sup> Field, *Of the Church*, vol. II, pp. 438-9.

of the judge in civil matters. His proper work is not to *make* a thing right or wrong, but simply to *declare* whether it is right or wrong, from his knowledge of the facts, and of the principles which apply in such a case. The matter is unfortunately complicated for us by the fact that the judge is frequently able to do things which are not purely judicial. It has generally been recognized, for example, that no system of human law is perfect; and accordingly the judge often has a certain power of expanding or modifying the law—through such things as the “residual justice” supposed to reside in a king<sup>1</sup>, or the Praetor’s Edict in Rome, or “case-made” law in England<sup>2</sup>, or the arbitrary decisions of a Kadi in the East. But such things, it is plain, are not strictly part of his function, and are only possible because the law which he exists to administer is such an imperfect one. The true human court, we must bear in mind, is a court of record. We can see it best, in its essential features, in the popular court of very early days; there was no written

<sup>1</sup> For further details see Maine, *Early Law and Custom*, chap. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Maine, *Ancient Law*, chaps. ii. and iii.

law, and the idea that law could be created by the fiat of an individual would have been absolutely inconceivable. The place of written law, however, was taken by *custom*, very carefully observed and preserved. When a difficulty arose which needed a judicial decision, the one question to be asked was, How did our fathers act? What is the custom (or law—they were one and the same thing) regulating this matter? The elder and wiser men gave their evidence, the principles were clearly seen and explained, and a consensus of voices pronounced a decision which was not their own—not in any sense representing their own personal views—but representing (in theory at least) what had been the custom always, throughout the tribe, and held by the whole tribe<sup>1</sup>.

Now the analogy between the judgement of a customary court in early days, and that of the Catholic Church in matters of faith, is a very close one. The Catholic Church has, not only in theory, however, but in fact, no power to judge as the temper of the

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité Antique*, Book iii, chap. 11; Maine, *Village Communities*, Lects. ii, iii; Hearn, *The Aryan Household*, chap. xvii; and Holland, *Jurisprudence*, chap. v. 1.

moment wills, but must judge in accordance with what has been held "*ubique, semper, ab omnibus*." She is a court of record: to settle a difficult question with regard to the faith she must have resort to her Scriptures, her councils, her doctors, her wise men of old days; and contrary to them, without or outside their witness, she can decide nothing. Where the Church and the ancient civil court differ, the Church is the more conservative. For in an ancient society, where antiquity gave no guidance, there was always room for some augury, some "theme" or "diké" which should supply guidance<sup>1</sup>, and this in time became part of the customary law; or new customs might grow up insensibly. But we have already seen that there is no possibility of new revelations of this kind in the Church. She can only judge by the standard of old days. In fact—and this is all-important—we are brought round to the same position as before; viz. that the power of judgement in the Church lies in her witness to the truth. Her word of condemnation is, "We have no such custom, neither the Churches of God<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Maine, *Ancient Law*, chap. I.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 16.

## IV.

Two conclusions would seem to follow from what has been said with regard to the function of the Church as a judge in controversies. (1) Seeing that the Church does not *make* articles of faith, but witnesses to their being so, it is by comparison a matter of lesser moment by whom the judgement is actually delivered—whether by an individual bishop, or a local synod of bishops, or a general synod. For in any case the person or persons who happen to be the mouthpiece declare what they believe to be the witness, the judgement, of the whole Church; and the final ratification of every such judgement is the same, namely, the consensus of the Universal Church. And just as the force and bearing of any of the laws of England may be declared by a metropolitan magistrate or a local justice of the peace, so may the mind of the Church be spoken (as it often has been) by a single bishop. Of course, there may be an appeal against the magistrate's decision to the Divisional Court (or however it may be), and it may be reversed, and so may the single bishop's or the synod's; but if so, it is simply on the ground that it does

not represent the law of the land in the one case, nor the faith of the Church in the other. But the resemblance is obvious: the magistrate's decision becomes a "leading case" because it accurately and incontrovertibly represents the meaning of the English law<sup>1</sup>; and the judgement as to the faith is accepted universally for the same reason,—because it accurately and incontrovertibly represents the mind of the Church. That is to say, it is merely the putting into words of what was always part of the faith<sup>2</sup>.

(2) To pass on to the second consequence. Since, as we have seen, every judgement as to the Faith is made in the name of the Church (just as every civil judgement is made in the name of the Law), it follows that decisions of faith in the name of the whole Church may be wrongly made. It is indeed a matter of notorious fact that they have been so made time after time. Nay more,

<sup>1</sup> Or at least, what people are content to accept for the time being as the meaning of the law. It is the virtue of the law that it grows and becomes modified in course of time; but on the other hand, the virtue of the Faith is that it is unchangeable. So that here the resemblance ends.

<sup>2</sup> "Non introducit jus novum, sed ipsum declarat" (Durand de Maillane, *Dict. du Droit Canon*, s.v. Publicatio).

wrong decisions of faith may be so made, as our Twenty-first Article of Religion says, and sometimes have been made, by (would-be) General Councils, "forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God." It is even conceivable that the whole Church at any particular time might *seem* to concur in a false decision as to the faith. For we must remember that the power of speaking authoritatively in the name of the whole Church—the "judgement of jurisdiction"—belongs only to some of its members: and it is possible that all of these, at some particular time, should be upholders of heresy, or at least not capable of refuting it when it was taught<sup>1</sup>. "There come times," says a modern theologian, "when the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> "Touching the judgement of recognition, we acknowledge the judgement of the Universal Church, comprehending the faithful that are and have been, to be infallible. In the Church that comprehendeth only the believers that live at one time in the world, there is always found a right judgement of discretion, and a right pronouncing of each thing necessary, all never falling into damnable error, nor into any error pertinaciously; but a right judgement of men, by their power of jurisdiction maintaining the truth and suppressing error, is not always found" (Field, *Of the Church*, vol. II, p. 440).



error . . . spreads abroad in the Church, and it becomes the duty of the faithful few, or the faithful one, to withstand the prevalent false doctrine of the day<sup>1</sup>." "It is possible," writes the great canonist of the fifteenth century, Cardinal Panormitan (Nicolaus de Tudeschis), "It is possible that the true faith of Christ might remain in a single person; so that it would still be true to say that the Faith would not have failed in the Church, seeing that the rights of the Church might reside in a single person whilst others sinned<sup>2</sup>". But to leave hypothetical cases: Our Lord intimated plainly that this might actually happen. "Except those days should be shortened," He said, "there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets . . . insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect<sup>3</sup>." And again, "Many

<sup>1</sup> Mason, *Faith of the Gospel*, chap. viii. § 7. William of Occam says, as most mediaeval writers would say, that under such circumstances men have nothing left unto them, but with sorrowful hearts to refer all to God (*Dial. Lib. V, Par. i, cap. 28*). I owe the reference to Dr. Field's work.

<sup>2</sup> Panormitan. *super Decret. I. 1, De Electione*. Quoted in Owen, *Dogmatic Theology*, p. 58. The whole passage is very interesting.

<sup>3</sup> S. Matt. xxiv. 22, 24.

false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many<sup>1</sup>." And S. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first<sup>2</sup>." And many parts of the Revelation of S. John the Divine would seem to point to the same thing<sup>3</sup>. And we know that it has happened so. The Councils of Seleucia and Ariminum practically betrayed the Church into an Arian profession: yet the faith was not thereby lost. When Liberius the Roman bishop was brought before the Arian Emperor Constantius, and taunted with the fact that he was the sole western champion of the Catholic faith, "The cause of the faith," he exclaimed, "is none the worse because I happen to be left alone<sup>4</sup>." And when at length, worn out by torture and insults, Liberius signed a heretical creed, S. Athanasius stood alone against the world. And yet the cause of the Faith was "none the worse," nor can be.

## V.

It might seem as if all this militates against the infallibility of the Church. I answer that

<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xxiv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 3. Cf. 1 Tim. iv. 1.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Rev. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Theodoret, *H. E.* ii. 16: Οὐ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι με μόνον, ὁ τῆς πιστέως ἐλαττοῦται λόγος.

it rather proves it. And this is our next point. That the Church is infallible is part of our faith; for it is part of the original deposit. "On this Rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it<sup>1</sup>." "I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world<sup>2</sup>."

But these sayings of our Lord at once point us to the true nature of her infallibility. The Church is infallible, not because of her doctors and teachers, her councils and her bishops, but because of her Lord. It is not that her members, or any of them, are infallible,—not that they are "verbally inspired," so to speak, in such a way that what they do is not their own act, but merely done through them as a medium. The Church has this treasure in earthen vessels. She is infallible because her Lord will not suffer her to fail. She is infallible in spite of her members, just as she is *One* in spite of all our disunions, and *Holy* in spite of all our sins; *Catholic* in spite of all our narrowness and sectarianism, and *Apostolic* in spite of all our unapostolic spirit. If the greater number of her members on earth at any moment fall away into heresy, she remains infallible still. For we must

<sup>1</sup> S. Matt. xvi. 18.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xxviii. 20.

never forget that it is the whole Church, the whole building of Christ, which is infallible: the whole Church in her length as well as her breadth, not only from one side of the globe to the other, but from the Day of Pentecost to our own day, and on to the Day of Judgement; nay more, in her depth and height, here on earth and at rest beyond the grave, and in heaven itself, where her Head now is. It is the whole Church which is infallible—infallible because He will not suffer her to fall. In heaven she cannot fail. And so we are certain—does not the teaching of history as well as the words of our Lord justify us?—we are certain that here on earth, as His witness in the world, the Church of God will never fall. Those who speak in her name may fail. The *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, may cause us to appreciate certain aspects of the truth only, to the neglect, it may be, of others no less precious<sup>1</sup>. But the great stream of God's truth does not and cannot fail. There will always be a remnant to carry on the faith to more faithful days; God will always have

<sup>1</sup> "Neither is a consensus of the entire Church of to-day sufficient, unless it be in harmony with the teaching of other ages also" (Mason, *Faith of the Gospel*, chap. viii. § 7).

saints who, filled not with the spirit of the age but the Spirit of Truth, will realize, each in his degree, the whole proportion of the faith.

It is then this whole mind of the Church to which we are to look for God's guidance, as expressed in the Creeds and the Fathers and proved by the Scriptures. Such was the statement of S. Vincent: we are to follow "those who living at different times and places, continued yet in the communion and faith of one Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>." Such is the testimony of a great English theologian of the middle ages, Thomas Netter of Walden, who writes: "It is not therefore any special Church—neither the African which Donatus so much admired, nor the particular Roman Church—which holds the faith which cannot be removed, but the universal Church: and this not as gathered together in general councils (since we have found these to have erred sometimes), but that Catholic Church of Christ which hath been dispersed throughout the whole world, ever since the baptism of Christ, through the apostles and their successors, and continued down to our own day; which undoubtedly keepeth the true faith and

<sup>1</sup> *Commonitorium*, c. iii.

the faithful witness of Christ, teaching wisdom unto babes, and holding fast to the truth amidst the worst errors<sup>1</sup>." Noble words these, as are all which Waldensis has to say upon the subject.

The *whole* mind of the Church: we cannot be content with anything less. The words which I have just read ought to convince us that we cannot ignore the later mind of the Church. We could not, if we would, cut ourselves off from eighteen centuries of human thought, from the Holy Spirit's work in His Church from the beginning till now. The Christian faith indeed does not grow, but we grow into it<sup>2</sup>. There is a very false sense in which we may think of development of doctrine, but our very dread of the term has perhaps kept us from realizing adequately the truth which it was meant to express. We cannot ignore the ripening of the Church's

<sup>1</sup> *Doctrinale Fidei*, lib. ii, art. ii, cap. 19 (quoted in Field, *Of the Church*, vol. IV, p. 52).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 41 f.: "Supremacy and permanence belong to Him alone . . . the growth into His spirit has been a matter of centuries, and proceeds but slowly even yet. The literature of to-day is worthier of Him than the literature of the second or third century; the religious consciousness has fewer pagan and more Christian elements now than it had then." I purposely omit the words that follow.

mind and judgement in later days. God has been leading His Church on by a path of unconscious but never-ceasing progress. Two ways in particular may be noticed in which the Church of later days has grown in her realization of the faith. (1) When the Church is brought face to face with some heresy, it is often necessary to safeguard the faith by some formal statement of a truth which had hitherto not been expressed by a formula. Thus, for example, the Nicene Creed was formulated as a safeguard against the new Arian heresy. In such a case, in the words of S. Vincent, the Church "consigns to posterity in the security of a formal document, what she had received from her ancestors by mere tradition," and "stamps with the speciality of a new term an article of the faith which is not new<sup>1</sup>." (2) But there is a somewhat different growth which we are perhaps more in danger of forgetting. The only way of entering upon the riches of faith is by believing; and by believing the Church

<sup>1</sup> S. Vinc. *Commonitorium*, c. xxiii: "Quod prius a majoribus sola traditione susceperat, hoc deinde posteris etiam per scripturae chirographum consignet . . . non novum fidei sensum, novae appellationis proprietate signando." See Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, pp. 53, 54.

is constantly growing into an ever fuller knowledge and realization of the Truth. And here again S. Vincent is a wise guide. "Fitting it is," writes he, "that the understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, as of one man, so also of the Church, should increase and abundantly go forward in the course of the centuries; but yet, after its own order; that is, in the same doctrine, the same sense, the same judgement." "The religion of our souls," he goes on, "should imitate the nature of our bodies, which develop and unfold their proportions, yet remain the same as they were. So also the doctrine of the Christian religion should follow the laws of growth; that is to say, in years it should wax sounder, in time it should become ampler, with continuance it should become more exalted, and yet remain uncorrupt and entire, full and perfect in the proportions of each one of its parts, and, so to speak, with the whole list of its members and its senses complete: and that beyond this it admit no further change, no loss of what is proper to it, no variety in definition<sup>1</sup>." In a word, of the seed of wheaten teaching we should reap the fruit of wheaten doctrine.

<sup>1</sup> S. Vinc. *Commonitorium*, c. xxiii.



Nothing could be more beautiful or more true. It is just what Bishop Westcott has said: "As the circumstances of men and nations change, materially, intellectually, morally, the life will find a fresh and corresponding expression. We cannot believe what was believed in another age by repeating the formulas which were then current. The greatest words change in meaning. The formulas remain to us a precious heritage, but they require to be interpreted. Each age has to apprehend vitally the Incarnation and the Ascension of Christ<sup>1</sup>."

## VI.

There is then such a thing as a Christian sense—the mind of the whole Church<sup>2</sup>; and it is this which is our guide, and the real authority behind every definition of faith. But it may be that this is a kind of authority "less simple than human impatience could wish<sup>3</sup>." So it has proved; and the

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *Gospel of Life*, p. 281. The whole chapter should be read. Cf. Gore, *Bampton Lectures*, No. iv, and Salmon, *Infallibility*, pp. 276-7.

<sup>2</sup> "Ecclesiastica intelligentia" (S. Vinc. *Commonit.* ii.); ἐκκλησιαστικὸν φρόνημα (Eus. *H. E.* v. 27); κανὼν ἐκκλησιαστικός (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vi.; p. 804, ed. Potter).

<sup>3</sup> Mason, *Faith of the Gospel*, chap. viii. § 7.

consequence is that men have accepted the idea of an infallible oracle embodied in the person of the Pope of Rome. With the steps by which this unheard-of novelty was gradually built up we are not now concerned ; but it will be well to point out certain consequences which inevitably follow from the dogma of Papal Infallibility, which is its culminating point.

(a) It gives an entirely new meaning to the term authority. In Thorndike's words, it is no longer "that which consisteth in testifying the faith once delivered, but in creating that which never was of force until the exercise of it<sup>1</sup>." For although it is true that this "authority" only professes to "guard and expound the deposit of faith," it is at least unquestionable that it claims to declare things to be *de fide* which previously were not so.

(b) No doubt Roman writers still continue to speak of the "authority of the Church ;" but it is the inevitable result of their position that they tend to make the Church not an authoritative body, but a body within which there are certain authoritative agencies<sup>2</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> Thorndike, *On the Principles of Christian Truth* (Works, vol. II, p. 562).

<sup>2</sup> This is explicitly stated, indeed, in the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* : "ideoque ejusmodi Romani Pontificis

attentive reading, for example, of what is said in nearly any Roman treatise upon the infallibility of the Church will make this clear<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it is not easy to see how it could be otherwise when authority is thought of as bound up in and springing from a single individual. I remember on one occasion a pupil of mine asked me whether an "Ultramontanist" was the same thing as a Montanist, only more so.<sup>2</sup> There is more in the question than might at first appear: for however they may differ in other ways, they agree in setting up an infallible authority other than that of the Church Catholic.

(c) Although, as has been said, the Roman Church is definitely committed to the position that the Church cannot reveal truth, yet the contrary doctrine is surely an inevitable result of their teaching as to the Pope's authority. For "no one, I imagine," writes Dr. Westcott, "would seriously hold that the doctrines of contemporary Romanism have been secretly taught from the days of the apostles in an unbroken succession."<sup>3</sup> And as it has been pointed

definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae, irreformabiles esse" (*Décrets et Canones*, p. 156).

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Regnier, *De Ecclesia Christi*, Part I, § 3.

<sup>2</sup> See *post*, p. 92 a.

<sup>3</sup> *Gospel of Life*, p. 280.

out<sup>1</sup>, the papal idea is the natural expression of promulgative authority, but not at all of consentient witness, which is the true function of the Church with regard to doctrine<sup>2</sup>. It would be a strange procedure to substitute one person for the myriad voices of Christendom, that out of the mouth of *one* witness every word should be established. But if there is to be substituted for the cumulative evidence of testimony the single voice of a promulgative authority, all is explained. Only, the faith once for all delivered is thereby betrayed. And it may be doubted whether, on the darkest night, the glimmer of an *ignis fatuus* can be of much assistance.

## VII.

For (a) at least it is beyond dispute that the authority of the Church as a whole is the authority which Christians of the early Church knew, and to which they commended themselves. S. Vincent, for instance, was writing for

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> To which, be it observed, this lecture refers throughout. It is agreed on all hands that, in the words of our Twentieth Article of Religion, "The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies"; and the relation of any special part of the Church to the canons made in former days is not now in question.

the ordinary Christian, "with the fidelity of a reporter," as he says, "rather than the presumption of an author<sup>1</sup>"; his purpose is "not to say all that might be said, but just to touch upon such things as are necessary<sup>2</sup>," and that "in easy and common speech<sup>3</sup>." And according to him the Catholic Christian is to consult the Scriptures for himself, and in interpretation of them to prefer antiquity to novelty, and the decrees of a general council before the temerity and folly of a few. And if there be none, he is to consult the ancient Fathers' opinions, "who, living at divers times and places, continued yet in the communion and faith of one Catholic Church." S. Chrysostom gives very similar guidance to an inquirer who came to him<sup>4</sup>; and the Fathers never dreamt of any other way. Even the great French bishop Bossuet speaks to much the same effect. In case of false definitions of faith, he says, there will be no danger of schism, "for the learned will be held by tradition, and the unlearned, if they are true sons

<sup>1</sup> "Relatoris fide potius quam auctoris praesumptione."  
—S. Vinc. *Commonit.* i.

<sup>2</sup> "Ut nequaquam omnia, sed tantum necessaria quaeque perstringam."

<sup>3</sup> "Facile, communique sermone."

<sup>4</sup> See Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 47, and note.

of the Church, will wait most obediently for the judgement of their pious mother<sup>1</sup>."

(b) And this authority commends itself to us by its naturalness. God usually guides us and speaks to us from within, and teaches us by all sorts of unseen ways—ways which exercise and call forth all our capacities. Such a guidance is that of the Church's authority. In a world where we know in part, are we naturally led to expect an external guide, of such a kind as to save us all trouble and exertion? Rather, as one has said, "God has taken a way of speaking through His Church which is more like His usual methods, more vital and less mechanical than that;—a way which involves more discipline to faith, as well as to intelligence, than the consulting of an external oracle and the submission to ready-made decrees<sup>2</sup>."

(c) And lastly, this authority commends itself to our consciences and our hearts, and calls forth our most abundant thankfulness. No doubt it is easier to have an authority which can be consulted at a moment's notice, and which can utter oracular responses to order; but we have yet to learn that what

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Defen. Decl. Cleri Gallicani*, x. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Mason, *op. cit.*

is easier is therefore better. No doubt the life of the Church as we know it is not free from difficulties: so it must be, or "what's a heaven for?" But we thankfully realize that we have the authority which God gave, and it suffices us. We have found by experience, that conforming our minds to the mind of the Church is at once a sure joy in the Communion of Saints, and a safe guide in the Catholic faith. And therefore we thank and praise Almighty God for His most excellent gift.

## NOTE.

## MONTANISM AND ULTRAMONTANISM (p. 88).

I did not know, when these words were written, that John Henry Newman had observed the resemblance between these two, and admitted it:

“Not in one principle or doctrine only, but in its whole system, Montanism is a remarkable anticipation or presage of developments which soon began to show themselves in the Church, though they were not perfected for centuries after. Its rigid maintenance of the original creed, yet its admission of a development, at least in the ritual, has just been instanced in the person of Tertullian. Equally Catholic in their principle, whether in fact or anticipation, were most of the other peculiarities of Montanism: its rigorous fasts, its visions, its commendation of celibacy and martyrdom, its contempt of temporal goods, its penitential discipline, and its centre of unity. The doctrinal determinations and the ecclesiastical usages of the middle ages are the true fulfilment of its self-willed and abortive attempts at precipitating the growth of the Church. . . .

And, though ascetics existed from the be-



ginning, the notion of a religion higher than the Christianity of the many was first prominently brought forward by the Gnostics, Montanists, Novatians, and Manichees. *And while the prophets of the Montanists prefigure the Church's doctors, and their inspiration her infallibility, and their revelations her developments, and the heresiarch himself is the unsightly anticipation of St Francis, in Novatian we discern the aspiration of nature after such creations of grace as St Benedict or St Bruno.*"—Newman, *Development of Doctrine*, first edition, pp. 350-352. The *italics* are ours.

Upon this passage Dean Milman not unnaturally comments "So 'Catholicism' is, after all, but *developed Montanism!*" (*Savonarola, Erasmus, and other Essays*, p. 346). We knew already that certain writers, such as Petavius, had 'justified the practice of authoritatively confirming popular impulses in matters of religion' (see Strong, *Papal Corruptions of Doctrine*, p. 144: Church Historical Society, No. xxvii). But even this is a very different thing from virtually teaching that, in the course of development, doctrines and practices which were once heretical have come to be part of the deposit of faith.

**XI.**

**THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH  
AND THE BISHOPS.**

**H**



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## XI.

# *The Voice of the Church and the Bishops.*

BY THE

REV. R. B. RACKHAM, M.A.,  
OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE RESURRECTION.

SEVENTH THOUSAND.

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## THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH AND THE BISHOPS.

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διὰ τοῦτο ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην . . . οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν . . .  
τῇ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας συνιστάνοντες ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς πᾶσαν  
συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων ἐνάπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.—2 Cor. iv. 1, 2.

WE start to-day with the assumption that there is such an utterance as the voice of the church, the *vox ecclesiae*: that the church has in technical language a *magisterium* or office of teaching: that in view of our Lord's commission to His apostles (St. John xx. 21, St. Matt. xxviii. 19) this *magisterium* is *authenticum*, or in other words has authority in matters of faith,—an authority which we can trust, relying upon the guidance of the Holy Ghost and the presence of our Lord with His church “even unto the end of the world” (St. John xiv. 17, 26, xvi. 13; St. Matt. xxviii. 20).

Our object is to inquire How does this *vox ecclesiae* speak? how are we to discern the true voice of the church among the many kinds of voices in the world? And as the

subjects of these lectures are to be treated historically, we shall endeavour to obtain our answer by examining how in matter of fact did the voice of the church find expression in the first three or four centuries of its history.

### A

Let us begin then with the apostolic age and observe what happened. We find certain letters of individual apostles addressed to individual churches or to the church at large, and we find the writers writing with calm but absolute assurance of authority: they write as uttering the truth, which will without question be accepted by those to whom they write. False teachers indeed there are<sup>1</sup>—and will be—who resist, but this very resistance only throws into greater relief the certainty of the apostles' tone. Higher authority—other than inspiration of God or the word of Christ—they know not; even to other coordinate, and therefore limiting, authority there is extremely little reference<sup>2</sup>. In fact we might look upon the apostolic epistles as a series of decretals. On the sur-

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Diotrephes (3 John 9): cf. Jude 4, etc.

<sup>2</sup> in 2 Peter we have references to the "apostles" (iii. 2), and to St. Paul (iii. 15).

face these remarks apply chiefly to the catholic epistles, for in the epistles of St. Paul we do find considerable reference to other authorities in the church: but in this case it is simply to declare St. Paul's entire independence of them. He gives an account of his intercourse with "James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars," but it is to assure us that he did not receive his gospel from them, nor indeed "from men or through man" at all<sup>1</sup>. If then the epistles generally resemble decretals, St. Paul in his claim to authority and in his no less exacting claim on the obedience of his converts stands out as a very pope.

Even in St. Paul's epistles however we can trace a distinction in the tone and claim of authority. When he speaks with absolute authority, he is speaking "in the person of Christ:" but at times he speaks in his own person, as an individual he gives his own judgement—"I, not the Lord"<sup>2</sup>—and then his opinion is weighty indeed<sup>3</sup> but not binding. Further we have direct statements<sup>4</sup> which show that the truth which he asserts

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. and ii.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> for he "also has the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. vii. 40).

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 23, xv. 3.



with absolute security and confidence is what he had "received"—whether by immediate revelation from the Lord Himself or by tradition from those who were in Christ before him. So like 'the twelve' as an apostle St. Paul was in the first place a witness. The function of the apostles in preaching and teaching was to bear witness<sup>1</sup>. Their *magisterium* lay in bearing witness; and it was in the exercise of this function that they could claim the security of the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul's epistles again reveal to us most vividly the existence of differences of opinion, even of dissensions, in the church: and when we turn to the history as recorded in the Acts we discover that authoritatively as the apostles write, as individuals they are not infallible—not even Peter—but liable to error. That such was the belief of the church is evinced by the accusations and criticisms that were so freely lavished upon St. Paul. His authority indeed might have been called in question, but we find 'the twelve' subject to the same treatment, even St. Peter himself. For "when Peter was come up to Jeru-

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 8.

salem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them<sup>1</sup>."

Our present aim is to ask What steps then were taken to eliminate error and establish the faith, to defend from falsehood and to vindicate the truth? And the methods we see at work are the very obvious ones of the comparison and testing of the witnesses and the consultation, conference and consent of the teaching authorities. In the instance quoted St. Peter was blamed wrongly, but he made his 'apology' (ἀπολογία), it appears, before "the apostles and the brethren," who concurred in his action—"they held their peace and glorified God<sup>2</sup>." On another occasion Peter himself "stood condemned," his judaizing at Antioch was inconsistent and culpable. In this case it was an individual apostle, St. Paul, who resisted him and made a public protest. St. Peter apparently acknowledged his error, and the matter went no further<sup>3</sup>. St. Paul on his second or third visit to Jerusalem laid his gospel "before them," i.e. probably the apostles and the brethren, but "privately before them who were of repute [viz. James

<sup>1</sup> Acts xi. 2, 3. Cf. 3 John 9.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xi. 1, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. ii. 11-14.

and Cephas and John], lest by any means I should be running, or had run, in vain<sup>1</sup>." At his last visit he submitted to the advice of James and "all the elders" with a view to clearing himself from the suspicions of the mass of the brethren<sup>2</sup>.

Far more serious however than any action of individuals, there early arose in the apostolic church a disagreement on a fundamental point of practice and doctrine (the relation of the Gospel to the Law, of Jew to Gentile)—a disagreement which occasioned "no small dissension and questioning," which threatened in fact to result in an open schism. The remedy, and that an adequate one, was found in a conference. The church of Antioch sent representatives (Paul and Barnabas) to Jerusalem, and "the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter." After "much questioning" leading apostles speak—St. Peter, next Paul and Barnabas, and at the end James apparently as president sums up the debate and as we should say proposes a motion "Wherefore my judgement is." His proposal is adopted and embodied in a letter, written in the name of "the apostles and the elder bre-

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xxi. 17-26.

thren" who claim the concurrence of the Holy Ghost in their decision. This letter containing "the decrees," "ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem," and accepted "by the whole church" there, is sent down to Antioch and then delivered to the other Gentile churches concerned, who also accept it, and by this acceptance the matter is settled as far as the church is concerned<sup>1</sup>. Disputes and factions may continue long after, but as a matter of fact the *vox ecclesiae* has spoken, and that finally and truly<sup>2</sup>.

Such then appears to have been the method of the utterance of the voice of the church in the apostolic age. There are three steps:

(1) the authoritative teaching of the individual apostle;

(2) to guard against error on his part, the action and protest of others, which protest in cases of extreme dissension leads in the

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. and xvi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> not, we must observe, with regard to the literal disciplinary "decrees," which having a local and temporary character have of necessity not been universally observed, but with regard to the fundamental underlying doctrine of the equality of Jew and Gentile and the abrogation of the law.

last resort to full conference and decision of the ruling body<sup>1</sup>;

(3) and lastly as the ratification, the proof so to speak, of the 'authenticity' of this decision, its acceptance by the whole church.

## B

These steps, this method, we shall find to be in fact—however changed the nomenclature or external circumstance—identically that which prevailed in the early church subsequently to the apostolic age, and which we therefore believe to be the divine method or constitution for the preservation and the handing on of the truth.

### i

First, we have the utterance of the teacher. In each 'parish' (*παροικία*) as it was called, there was one supreme authority—the bishop. He was the successor of the apostles, and as such inherited all those functions, duties, and powers, which were 'ordinary' to them, i.e. intended to be perpetual in the church. This

<sup>1</sup> I use this term advisedly to avoid the discussion, alien to our present purpose, as to the part played by presbyters in the synods of the Church.

position I may here take for granted and not spend time over quotations from Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian and other early authorities: only emphasizing this further point that within his 'parish,' each bishop was entirely independent and responsible to God only. This St. Cyprian,—that "most blessed and glorious pope<sup>1</sup>," archbishop or patriarch of Africa as we might call him<sup>2</sup>,—is careful to define: he says in a letter to pope Stephen of Rome (c. 250) "nor do we use force or lay down the law to anyone [of the bishops] since in the administration of his church each ruler has the free choice of his own will, having to give account of his action to the Lord (alone)<sup>3</sup>." With this it may

<sup>1</sup> as the Roman clergy address him (*Ep.* xxx. 8).

<sup>2</sup> This date is of course long before the full development of the hierarchical organization, but the bishop of Carthage as head of all the primates and metropolitans of the six western African provinces would probably have received the title of patriarch, or certainly exarch.

<sup>3</sup> "[qua in re] nec nos vim cuique facimus aut legem damus, quando habeat in ecclesiae administratione voluntatis suae arbitrium liberum unusquisque praepositus, rationem actus sui Domino redditurus" (*Ep.* lxxii. 3); cf. his address to the council assembled at Carthage in 256: "neque enim quisquam nostrum episcopum se episcoporum constituit aut tyrannico terrore ad obsequendi necessitatem collegas suos adigit, quando habeat omnis episcopus pro licentia libertatis et potestatis suae

not be out of our way to compare the famous utterance of St. Jerome, 150 years later: "Wherever a bishop may be, whether at Rome or Gubbio, at Constantinople or Rhegium, at Alexandria or Tanis, he has the same worth, the same priesthood. Neither influence of wealth nor the low estate of poverty can make a bishop higher or lower. But all are alike successors of the apostles<sup>1</sup>."

Among the functions of the apostolate falls that of 'teaching,' *magisterium*, διδασκαλία. The bishop is the διδάσκαλος or 'teacher': as Hippolytus expresses it "of whom [the apostles] we are the successors, sharing the same grace, both of the high-priesthood and of the teaching<sup>2</sup>." The apostles, according to Irenaeus, "left the bishops as their suc-

arbitrium proprium, tamque iudicari ab alio non possit quam nec ipse possit alterum iudicare. sed expectamus universi iudicium domini nostri Iesu Christi qui unus et solus habet potestatem et praeponendi nos in ecclesiae suae gubernatione et de acta nostro iudicandi" (Hartel i, p. 436).

<sup>1</sup> "ubicunque fuerit episcopus sive Romae sive Eugubii sive Constantinopoli sive Rhegii sive Alexandriae sive Tanis eiusdem meriti eiusdem est etiam sacerdotii, potentia divitiarum et paupertatis humilitas vel sublimiorem vel inferiorem episcopum non facit. ceterum omnes successores apostolorum sunt" (*Ep. ad Eangel.* cxlvi).

<sup>2</sup> ὅν ἡμῖς διάδοχοι τυγχάνοντες, τῆς τε αὐτῆς χάριτος μετέχοντες, ἀρχιερατείας τε καὶ διδασκαλίας (*Philos. prof.*).

cessors, handing over to them their own place of teaching"; and these "with the succession of the episcopate received according to the will of the Father the sure gift of truth<sup>1</sup>." In the Clementines the bishop's chair is "the chair of the words<sup>2</sup>." As διδάσκαλος, the bishop is not only the source of positive teaching, he is also the judge of the truth, the final referee on questions of true and false doctrine—to borrow from the Clementines again he is "the ambassador of the truth," "the president of the truth<sup>3</sup>." This position is amply borne out by the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles. Thus Timothy is not only himself to "command and teach," to "give heed (προσέχειν) to (the) teaching," to "handle aright (rightly divide) the word of truth," to "preach the word<sup>4</sup>;" he is also the judge in matters as of discipline<sup>5</sup>, so of doctrine,—he is to "charge certain men not to teach

<sup>1</sup> "successores relinquebant, suum ipsorum locum magisterii tradentes" (*adv. Haer.* iii. 3. 1): "cum episcopatus successione charisma veritatis certum secundum placitum Patris acceperunt" (*iv.* 26. 2).

<sup>2</sup> ἡ τῶν λόγων καθέδρα (*Ep. Clem.* 2).

<sup>3</sup> ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας πρεσβύτερος, ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας προκαθήμενος (*Ep. Clem.* 6 & 2).

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 11, 13, 2 Tim. ii. 13, iv. 2.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. v. 17-25.



a different doctrine," he is to "refuse profane and old wives' fables, and foolish and ignorant questionings." Titus is to "refuse a man that is heretical after a first and second admonition<sup>1</sup>." And, lastly, what Timothy has received he is to "commit (hand on) to faithful men who will be able to teach others also<sup>2</sup>," or in other words St. Paul makes provision for a succession of teachers.

## ii

This office and authority of the bishop is a serious one. It is a serious thing to assert that in his own diocese a bishop should be not only the teacher, but the judge of the truth. All men are liable to err. If a Peter "stood condemned," who shall secure a bishop from falling, a bishop who may quite possibly be unlearned, even unable to read<sup>3</sup>? And so in fact from our point of view the history of the church is the history of the gradual limitation of the bishop's *magisterium*,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. i. 3, iv. 7, 2 Tim. ii. 23, Titus iii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> cf. the *Ap. Ch. Order*: the candidate for the episcopate should be *δυνάμενος τὰς γραφὰς ἐρμηνεύειν, εἰ δὲ ἀγράμματος, πρὸς ὑπάρχων. Ap. Const. ii. 1* ἔστω οὖν εἰ δυνατόν πεπαιδευμένος, εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀγράμματος ἀλλ' οὖν ἔμπειρος τῶν λόγων.

surrounding it with checks and safeguards, providing for his teaching—where it is doubtful tests, where in error correction, where sound confirmation.

The first limitation lies in the nature of the *magisterium* itself. Just as the primary function of the apostle was to bear witness, so the 'teaching' (διδασκαλία) of the bishop only extends (i.e. with security) to the truth which he has received. "Guard the deposit: the good deposit guard through the Holy Ghost: hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me"—such is St. Paul's charge to Timothy: and then "the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses the same commit thou to faithful men<sup>1</sup>." The bishop receives a deposit, *depositum fidei*, παραθήκη: and his commission is to teach this, to guard this, and to hand on this. Again I need not quote the fathers, so abundantly is this principle of the apostolical succession illustrated, so strenuously is it appealed to.

With this internal limitation there goes in the second place an external one—and that a powerful one, viz. the witness of the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 20, 2 Tim. i. 14, 13, ii. 2.

rest of the church, and especially that of the coordinate teaching authority, the episcopate. So imperative did the church find the need of limiting the individual action of her bishops, so irresistibly was forced upon her the conviction that in matters of church life and truth "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety," that from very early times measures were taken to secure the cooperation of bishops. In our oldest disciplinary authorities<sup>1</sup> we find the presence and cooperation of the neighbouring bishops at the election, examination and ordination of a bishop assumed. St. Cyprian speaks of this custom as being a matter "of divine tradition and apostolic observance, maintained in almost all the provinces<sup>2</sup>." The 'apostolic canon' requiring a bishop to be consecrated by two or three bishops is probably of very early origin. But apart from such evidence, already in the third century it has become a definite part

<sup>1</sup> e.g. the Canons of Hippolytus, the Apostolic and Egyptian Church Orders, the Apostolic Constitutions.

<sup>2</sup> "diligenter de traditione divina et apostolica observacione servandum est et tenendum quod apud nos quoque et fere per provincias universas tenetur, ut ad ordinationes rite celebrandas ad eam plebem cui praepositus ordinatur episcopi eiusdem provinciae conveniant" (*Ep.* lxvii. 5).

of the church's organization that the bishops of a district should meet together once or twice a year in *synods* or *councils* for mutual deliberation and action, the decisions of the synod being embodied in rules or *canons*, which carry in the church the force of law. "Wherefore," writes Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia in the third century, "with us it is become necessary that every year we elders and rulers should meet together to arrange what is committed to our care, that by common counsel may be directed what matters are of graver importance<sup>1</sup>." So essential a part of the ecclesiastical organization did synods become that a hundred years later (towards 340) Eusebius could exclaim "no otherwise than by synods could great questions be settled<sup>2</sup>."

The main and original object of these synods was the settlement of matters of discipline and the working of the penitential system<sup>3</sup>, but naturally matters of faith also

<sup>1</sup> "qua ex re necessario apud nos fit, ut per singulos annos seniores et praepositi in unum conveniamus ad disponenda ea quae curae nostrae commissa sunt, ut si qua graviora sunt communi consilio dirigantur" (ap. Cypr. Ep. lxxv. 4).

<sup>2</sup> *Vita Const.* i. 51, Bright *History of the Church* p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Thus the Nicene Canon 5 orders synods to be held

would come under their cognizance; disputed teaching would be referred to the assembled bishops, and their utterance would pass for the final sentence. So in fact the earliest synods of which we have any knowledge met about the middle of the second century to examine the phenomena of Montanism. Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, tells us that "the faithful in Asia<sup>1</sup> met together many times and in many places of Asia for this purpose, they examined the recent utterances and pronounced them profane and rejected the heresy, so [the heretics] were thrust out of the church and debarred from communion<sup>2</sup>." In the next century the doctrine associated with the name of Novatian

twice a year that τὰ τοιαῦτα ζητήματα [i.e. of discipline] ἐξετάζοιτο: one is to be before Lent ἵνα πάσης μικροψυχίας ἀναιρουμένης τὸ δῶρον καθαρὸν προσφέρηται τῷ θεῷ. But in the later Apostolic Canons (36) the synods are to ἀνακρίνειν τὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσεβείας, as well as the ἐκκλησιαστικὰς ἀντιλογίας.

<sup>1</sup> In quotations, &c., Asia is of course taken in its contemporary limited usage as designating the title of a province in the west of Asia Minor, being a rough equivalent for the western part of Asia Minor.

<sup>2</sup> τῶν γὰρ κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν πιστῶν πολλάκις καὶ πολλαχῇ τῆς Ἀσίας εἰς τοῦτο συνελθόντων καὶ τοὺς προσφάτους λόγους ἐξετασάντων καὶ βεβήλους ἀποφηνάντων, καὶ ἀποδοκιμασάντων τὴν αἵρεσιν, οὕτω δὲ τῆς τε ἐκκλησίας ἐξεώσθησαν καὶ τῆς κοινωνίας εἰρχθῆσαν (ap. Euseb. H. E. v. 16).

occasioned synods at Rome, Carthage and Antioch (a. 251). The validity of heretical baptism was thus discussed in Asia Minor, in Africa, and at Rome. To allude to the interminable synods which met in the fourth and following century is hardly necessary. In this manner individual bishops would become themselves subject to synods in regard of their teaching: thus in 244 a synod sat at Bostra in judgement on its bishop Beryllus<sup>1</sup>; Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, held a synod at Arsinoe to pronounce upon the chiliasm of its bishop Nepos<sup>2</sup>. But higher than Nepos or Beryllus, Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, the third city in the empire, gave rise to suspicions of heterodoxy. Three synods met at Antioch to enquire into it (264-269), and by the third he was at last condemned<sup>3</sup>. In later ages the trial of a patriarch was a frequent cause of the summoning of a general or would-be general council. But we have sufficiently established this external limitation which is best expressed in the words of St. Augustine: "who does not know . . . that bishops' writings, if aught in them has

<sup>1</sup> Eus. vi. 33.<sup>2</sup> Eus. vii. 24.<sup>3</sup> Eus. vii. 27-30.

perchance deviated from the truth can be censured either by the haply wiser criticism of one more learned in the matter, or by the weightier authority and better instructed skill of other bishops, or by councils<sup>1</sup>?"

The local synod claimed to express the voice of the whole church. Tertullian speaks of the local councils "throughout the Greeces," viz. Greek-speaking lands, as "a representation of the whole Christian name<sup>2</sup>;" the council of Antioch which deposed Paul of Samosata announces "to the catholic church under heaven" that they have excommunicated Paul and appointed a new bishop "of the catholic church<sup>3</sup>." The synod also claimed the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Following the letter of the council of Jerusalem, the canons of a Carthaginian council

<sup>1</sup> "quis nesciat . . . episcoporum autem litteras, quae post confirmatum canonem vel scriptae sunt vel scribuntur, et per sermonem forte sapientiores cuiuslibet in ea re peritioris et per aliorum episcoporum graviores auctoritatem doctioremque prudentiam et per concilia licet reprehendi, si quid in eis forte a veritate deviatum est" (*de Bapt.* ii. 4).

<sup>2</sup> "aguntur per graecias illa certis in locis concilia ex universis ecclesiis per quae et altiora quaeque in commune tractantur et ipsa representatio totius nominis christiani magna veneratione celebratur" (*de Ieiun.* 13).

<sup>3</sup> *Eus.* vii. 30.

begin "We have decided, at the suggestion of the Holy Spirit and the admonition of the Lord through many evident visions<sup>1</sup>." But as the individual bishop might err, so the local synod might err; and as with individual bishops, so with bishops gathered in synods safety lay in comparison and cooperation, the comparison of decisions and the cooperation of one synod with another. Hence on important matters of discipline as well as of doctrine, we find that one and the same question is discussed in numerous synods in very different parts of the church. For instance, when the Paschal controversy arose in the second century, synods on the subject were held in Palestine, Rome, Pontus, Gaul, and Osrhoene: other examples have been given above. And communication between the synods would give rise to a great deal of correspondence, as Eusebius tells us of the synods in question: "they wrote down the dogma of the church in letters to all parts<sup>2</sup>." This correspondence was necessary to obtain the witness, or learn the faith, of other parts of the church. In

<sup>1</sup> "placuit nobis sancto Spiritu suggerente et Domino per visiones multas et manifestas admonente" (*Ep. lvii. 5*).

<sup>2</sup> *Eus. v. 23.*



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in letters to all parts of the world. It was necessary to do this, for the faith of other Christians was at stake. The way.

<sup>2</sup> Ensa. v. 23.

the Paschal controversy the Asiatic synods "wrote to all parts," but their practice differed from that of Rome, and the Roman bishop Victor endeavoured to "cut off the provinces of all Asia from the common unity, declaring them utterly excommunicate." But this action was resisted by other bishops, especially Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, who wrote from Gaul and sharply rebuked him<sup>1</sup>. On the subject of baptism Stephen and the Roman church differed from Cyprian and the African church which re-baptized converts from heresy. This led Cyprian to write to Firmilian in Cappadocia, and the African custom was ratified by the synods of Asia Minor (c. 251-6). The council of Antioch which excommunicated Paul took care to send its sentence in a letter to the chief bishops and all the clergy of Christendom. Similarly Demetrius of Alexandria, after holding a synod, wrote "to the bishops throughout the world" his protest against the ordination of Origen by Palestinian bishops (c. 230)<sup>2</sup>. When Alexander had condemned Arius in a synod in 321 he wrote an account of the heresy and sentence "to his

<sup>1</sup> Eus. v. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Eus. vi. 8.

beloved and most honoured fellow-ministers throughout the catholic church<sup>1</sup>."

Concurrently with this development of intercourse between synods, there was a growth in the importance of the single synod. The council of Antioch was small indeed in numbers but it was composed of the leading bishops of Asia<sup>2</sup>. Polycrates of Ephesus, writing to Victor, excuses himself from adding the signatures of the bishops at his synod because of their "great numbers<sup>3</sup>." In 251 a "very great synod" of sixty bishops met at Rome to judge Novatian and his doctrine<sup>4</sup>. Similarly "very great synods" were meeting in Asia Minor to discuss the baptism of heretics<sup>5</sup>. Eighty-seven bishops assembled for the synod at Carthage in 256<sup>6</sup>. Later at Arles in 314 if the actual number of prelates assembled is uncertain, it is certain that they represented the whole west<sup>7</sup>. But by this time the conversion of the emperor made it

<sup>1</sup> Socrates i. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria and Firmilian of Caesarea were only prevented from attending—the one by age, the other by death. Firmilian died on the way.

<sup>3</sup> πολλὰ πλῆθη (Eus. v. 24).

<sup>4</sup> μεγάλη συνodus (Eus. vi. 43).

<sup>5</sup> μέγισται σύνοδοι (Eus. vii. 5).

<sup>6</sup> Cypr. i. 435 (Hartel).

<sup>7</sup> even bishops from Britain were present.

possible to realize at last what is clearly the ideal, or culmination, of the synodal system, viz. a single synod representing the whole church, or in other words a *general council* or *ecumenical synod*. In such a council instead of a limited number of local bishops, all the bishops of the church are ideally supposed to meet, consult, and decide. And therefore it is a distinct advance upon the local synods, to such an extent that it forms as it were a higher grade to which the others yield as to a final court of appeal. "And who does not know," continues St. Augustine, "that these councils [which have power to censure bishops], whether of districts or provinces, themselves without any doubt yield to the authority of plenary councils which are assembled from the whole Christian world<sup>1</sup>?" The first general council was held in 325 at Nicaea and its utterance could if anything lay claim to be *vox ecclesiae*—a claim in which we acquiesce, as it has obtained the fulfilment of a further condition which yet remains to be discussed.

<sup>1</sup> "et ipsa concilia quae per singulas regiones vel provincias fiunt, plenariorum conciliorum auctoritati quae fiunt ex universo orbe christiano, sine ullis ambagibus cedere" (*de Bapt.* ii. 4).

But we must not pass by a third and further limitation upon the bishop's *magisterium*, imposed to a large extent by this very synodal action of the church. From the beginning as the bishop's function as διδάσκαλος or teacher was to be the witness to a deposit, so that deposit—the teaching or tradition of the apostles—was itself largely committed to writing, and holy Scripture thus formed the supreme criterion of the teaching and tradition of the bishop. With this St. Augustine in his chain of authority already quoted had begun “Who does not know that Holy Scripture . . . is so superior to all the later writings of the bishops that in no way at all can doubt or disputation be thrown upon it, as to the truth and correctness of whatever is certainly written therein<sup>1</sup>?” In a similar way the more concise summaries of the doctrine handed down in the apostolic tradition, which had been getting more and more stereotyped in baptismal and other formulas, were by the working of the synodal system more and

<sup>1</sup> “quis autem nesciat sanctam scripturam canonicam, tam V. quam N. Testamenti, certis suis terminis contineri, eamque omnibus posterioribus episcoporum litteris ita praeponi, ut de illa omnino dubitari vel disceptari non possit, utrum verum vel utrum rectum sit quicquid in ea scriptum esse constiterit” (*de Bapt.* ii. 4).

more reduced to writing: until at last the fundamental verities of the faith received their final formal definition in the creeds of the general councils, and these creeds being written records of the 'deposit' (*depositum fidei*) have taken the place of that oral tradition, by which the faith was originally handed on, and by which the teaching of the bishops was tested.

This principle of written limitation of the authority of the bishop we find at work in the sphere not only of doctrine but also of worship and discipline. For some time the bishop retained very full powers of extemporizing in the liturgy, and he was the final liturgical authority for his diocese<sup>1</sup>. But liturgies soon became fixed, and thus supplied another criterion of the original deposit of faith, for *lex orandi lex credendi*: while the liturgical liberty of the bishop has almost disappeared under congregations of rites or written rubrics. Similarly in his judicial powers his freedom of action, as supreme judge in his diocese, was limited by canon after canon of the synods, which canons gave rise to a vast edifice of canon law, within

<sup>1</sup> See Brightman, *Liturgies*, pref. pp. xxiii, xliii.

whose walls the bishop's actions were as fettered—or more so—than those of his flock.

We have then traced out a symmetrical and convincing method of discovering and testing the *vox ecclesiae*. We began with the teaching authority (*magisterium*) of the individual bishop. His teaching is guarded and limited by its own essential character viz. the bearing of witness, by Holy Scripture and written documents, and—what is of most practical importance—by the judgment of his fellow teachers and fellow witnesses in a synod. From one synod we go to another, from lower to higher, till in the ecumenical synod, the assembly of all the witnesses, after all the previous siftings and testings we come at last to a voice of the church which is presumably authoritative and true. But before we can go on to add the coping-stone as it were, the final and indispensable seal, to the utterance of the council we come upon a difficulty in the way, which must be removed, a difficulty which spoils the symmetry and springs indeed from the same original source. If the history of the church can be described as the history of the gradual limitation of the independent episcopal authority, on the other hand that same authority, which



already at the starting point seemed extraordinarily absolute, itself received a great development; it resisted and became a rival to the external controlling power of the synod, until at last the rivalry culminated in a struggle between the Bishop of Rome and the General Council that is, between the chiefest of bishops and the chiefest of councils—a struggle which as regards the larger part of western Christendom has this century been decisively settled in favour of the bishop. This contest, and the question generally of the authority of popes and councils, lies outside the scope of this lecture: but it is our place to ask if we can find in the early history of the church any basis, any sanction for such a claim of the bishop to absolute authority in his teaching capacity.

The growth of the claim can be historically traced and accounted for. As in the case of any testimony the value of a witness depends largely on his character, so the character of any one bishop might raise him to a certain preeminence among his fellows. When a bishop's repute for sanctity and theological skill was established he would be appealed to from all quarters, and in fact most controversies with their synods centre

round a few famous names. Thus the name of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, holds a conspicuous place in the history of Asia Minor in the second century, and he appears at Rome as the representative of the eastern churches in the discussion of the Easter question<sup>1</sup>. His disciple Irenaeus had made his reputation before he became bishop of Lyons in 177: we find him writing letters against schismatics at Rome, and also strenuously resisting Victor bishop of Rome when he endeavoured to excommunicate the Asiatic churches<sup>2</sup>. To take a later instance, St. Augustine was but the bishop of an ordinary town (Hippo) in Africa, but his fame was so spread that he was summoned to the general council of Ephesus in 431 to which otherwise only metropolitans had been invited. Further it was natural that the different local churches should take a lively interest in each others' welfare; the church of Rome writes to heal the dissensions in the church at Corinth<sup>3</sup>, in the second century she was famed for her contributions to other churches and the sufferers in the mines<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Eus. v. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Eus. v. 20 and 24.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. in the epistle of Clement, which is written in the name of the Roman Church.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Dionysius' letter in Eus. iv. 23.

the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons write an epistle to their brethren in Asia Minor<sup>1</sup>: and it is quite in keeping with this for bishops to write of their own accord to other churches. Thus to leave out of sight Clement and Ignatius, we have in the second century Polycarp writing to the Philippians, Dionysius of Corinth writing to the churches of Lacedæmon, Athens, Nicomedia, Gortyna, Amastris, Gnossus, and Rome<sup>2</sup>, and a successor in his chair, Bacchyllus, seems to have followed his example<sup>3</sup>. The natural outcome of this kind of influence was the authority and deference ascribed to 'the fathers': and the fathers, though some of them were only presbyters, may be said to have maintained the 'apostolical succession' of such bishops.

Another reason that gave special eminence to certain bishops was the eminence of their sees. Naturally the bishop of an important city, of a leading city of the empire, would be a far abler man than the average bishop. Hence we often find these two sources of influence, place and character, combined, as for instance—not to speak of the Roman pontiffs—in St. Cyprian bishop

<sup>1</sup> in Eus. v. 1.<sup>2</sup> Eus. iv. 23.<sup>3</sup> Eus. v. 23.

of Carthage the capital of Africa, St. Dionysius bishop of Alexandria the second city in the empire, St. Firmilian bishop of Caesarea the capital of eastern Asia Minor. Again the doctrine of the church of a capital or great metropolis would be a most important element in the witness to the universal or catholic faith, and in such cities would be gathered the most weighty synods. Now the bishop of the city would not only preside over its synod, but he would be the representative of its church. Hence he would naturally be the agent, whether as sender or receiver, of its correspondence with other churches; gradually the synod and the local church would sink more into the background, while his personality would fill the view: and as questions grew more complicated, as appeals to catholicity, i.e. to the witness of the church in all quarters grew more necessary—the easiest way of making such an appeal would be to write to the bishops of the leading sees. We have had occasion already to quote instances of this correspondence, but it is as well to illustrate the growing prominence of the bishops. About 248 Origen the Egyptian writes to “Fabian bishop of Rome and very many other rulers of the church” in defence

of his orthodoxy<sup>1</sup>. The inscription of the letter of the Council of Antioch in 269 was "To Dionysius and Maximus<sup>2</sup> and all our fellow ministers throughout the world, bishops and presbyters and deacons, and to the whole catholic church under heaven." In 251 Cornelius bishop of Rome writes an account of the doctrine and schism of Novatian to Fabius bishop of Antioch and Dionysius of Alexandria<sup>3</sup>. But the correspondence of the latter prelate will afford us the best illustration. We are told of letters of his to Fabius of Antioch and Cornelius of Rome about Novatianism<sup>4</sup>, to Stephen and Xystus of Rome on rebaptism<sup>5</sup>, to the latter also about Sabellius and other heretics asking for his "opinion" (γνώμη)<sup>6</sup>, and to Dionysius of Rome—four letters on Sabellianism<sup>7</sup>. As the ecclesiastical organization developed, this correspondence crystallized into the rule whereby every bishop of an important see on

<sup>1</sup> Eus. vi. 36.

<sup>2</sup> bishops of Rome and Alexandria respectively (in Eus. vii. 30).

<sup>3</sup> Eus. vi. 43, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Eus. vi. 44, 46.

<sup>5</sup> Eus. vii. 2, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Eus. vii. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Eus. vii. 26. Dionysius also wrote to his Roman brother about Lucian (vii. 9). Dionysius was bishop of Alexandria from about 248 to 265.

his election sent 'communicatory letters' to the patriarchs, signifying his faith<sup>1</sup>: and no important transaction concerning the faith would take place without being also reported to the patriarchs.

While the chief bishops were thus widely consulted, their eminence led them to take an interest spontaneously in the affairs of the whole church. Ordinary bishops as we have seen could think of other churches outside their jurisdiction, but these bishops from their exalted thrones were able and felt bound to take a wider outlook over the church: they felt a responsibility for the faith at large. The basis of this interference—if we may use the term without any adverse bias—lay in the theory of an universal episcopate in regard to the faith, which is best stated

<sup>1</sup> That already in the third century this was the custom in relation to the great sees we learn from the synodical letter of Antioch already referred to, in which the synod asks the bishops to receive the *κοινωνικά γράμματα* of Domnus the new catholic bishop (Eus. vii. 30). For a witness to its extension see the communicatory letter of Sophronius patriarch of Jerusalem 633-637 to Sergius: *ἐπεὶ δὲ τις ἀποστολικὴ καὶ ἀρχαία παράδοσις ἐν ταῖς κατὰ πάσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἀγίας ἐκκλησίας κεκράτηκεν, ὅπως οἱ πρὸς ἱεραρχίαν ἀγόμενοι τοῖς πρὸς [ἢ πρὸ] αὐτῶν τὰς ἱεραρχίας χειρίζουσι πάντα εὐλικρινῶς ἀνατίθωνται, ὅπως φρόνοιεν καὶ ὅπως πίστει ἔχοιεν* (Migne P.G. lxxxvii. p. 3149).

in the words of St. Cyprian: "for this cause is there a numerous body of priests [i.e. bishops] bound together in the bond of mutual concord and unity, that if any of our college should attempt to form a heresy and to tear and devastate the flock of Christ, the rest should come to its assistance . . . . for although we are many pastors, yet we feed one flock, and the whole flock of sheep which Christ won by His blood and passion we ought to cherish and keep in one<sup>1</sup>." It was in such a sense that St. Gregory Nazianzen called St. Cyprian "bishop not only of Carthage, but also of the whole west, aye and well-nigh of the eastern, northern, and southern parts of the Church," and that St. Basil told St. Athanasius that he had "as much a care of all the churches, as of that peculiarly committed to him of the Lord." The author of the Clementines may not have meant anything more when he called James the first bishop of Jerusalem "bishop of bishops" and "ruler of the churches planted everywhere as well as of the Hebrew church of Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>." For instances of action, the letter of Cyprian's just quoted was

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* lxxviii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Bingham *Eccl. Antiq.* ii. 5. 1.

directed to Stephen of Rome, bidding him take steps for the appointment of a new prelate in place of Marcian of Arles; and the preceding letter is an answer to the Spanish bishops who had appealed to Cyprian and the Africans against two excommunicated bishops who had been received into communion by Stephen of Rome. Besides his letters already mentioned, Dionysius of Alexandria writes on matters of the faith to the Laodiceans and the Armenians, to "those in Rome" and the Novatian confessors there<sup>1</sup>, also to the Roman presbyters Dionysius and Philemon<sup>2</sup>. Typical illustrations are to be found in later times in the action of Theophilus of Alexandria against St. Chrysostom of Constantinople, and of St. Cyril of Alexandria against Nestorius of Constantinople. The most conspicuous cases however are in connection with the Roman see. And there is an obvious reason. For Rome is the only see which continues at the present day to claim an extraordinary *magisterium* or absolute authority in relation to matters of faith, and in support of it to adduce all instances of the claim in past history. But

<sup>1</sup> Eus. vi. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Eus. vii. 5. Dionysius afterwards became pope.



the full discussion of this question belongs to a later lecture<sup>1</sup>; and for us it only remains to ask, in the face of these historical facts, whether under this action of certain bishops there lay any justifying principle, whether the bishops of any particular sees had a *magisterium* distinct from and superior to that of any other bishop: and the answer must be in the negative. We can trace the historical growth of these claims, we can assign historical causes for that growth: but of the existence of any belief in a superior *magisterium* of any one bishop over another we can find no evidence in these early centuries. On the other hand we observe that

(1) The utterances of these bishops are really the utterances of the synods over which they presided. No doubt the synod tended to fall into the background, its mention often dropped out of the history, but the synod was there. Historians write of Victor as acting on his own authority in the Paschal controversy, but Eusebius speaks of "a writing of a synod at Rome showing Victor as bishop<sup>2</sup>." Cornelius in writing to Fabius and Dionysius sends a report of the Roman synod, adding the signatures of the

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Robertson's *Roman Claims to Supremacy*.

<sup>2</sup> Eus. v. 21.

bishops<sup>1</sup>. Cyprian generally writes in the name of his synods: the letter to the Spanish bishops is really a synodal letter. Demetrius and Athanasius both wrote after holding synods. So on the other hand the letters to the bishops of Rome and Alexandria are only directed to them in the first instance, as we can see from the letters of Origen and the Council of Antioch already quoted. Polycrates writes to "Victor and the Roman church:" Dionysius to "Xystus and the Roman church<sup>2</sup>."

(2) In any case the utterance of the bishops is but their witness to the faith as it is held in their church. In the Paschal controversy Anicetus the Roman bishop would not give way, because he was maintaining—not his own opinions, but—"the custom of the elders before him<sup>3</sup>." Stephen was contentious on the subject of baptism, because he thought that "no innovation should be made upon the tradition that had prevailed from the beginning<sup>4</sup>."

(3) The utterances themselves could be and

<sup>1</sup> Eus. vi. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Eus. v. 24, vii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> τὴν συνήθειαν τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ πρεσβυτέρων (Eus. v. 24).

<sup>4</sup> μὴ δεῖν τι νεώτερον παρὰ τὴν κρατήσασαν ἀρχὴν παρὰδοσιν ἐπικαινοτόμειν (Eus. vii. 3).

were set aside. Victor was "sharply rebuked<sup>1</sup>" by Irenaeus and other bishops, and his excommunication apparently dropped. If Cyprian and Firmilian were excommunicated by Stephen, they and their churches disregarded his decisions about baptism: to the excommunication Firmilian's reply was "thou hast excommunicated thyself<sup>2</sup>." As the African church was seriously hampered by the interference of the popes in the exercise of its discipline, so on the other hand Cyprian's synod reversed a sentence of Stephen's about the Spanish bishops Martial and Basilides<sup>3</sup>; and as late as 418 an African council again set aside a papal pronouncement of Zosimus in favour of the Pelagians, enacting that "the sentence of his predecessor Innocent should abide<sup>4</sup>."

In the history of the development of epis-

<sup>1</sup> πληκτικώτερον καθαπτομένων (Eus. v. 24).

<sup>2</sup> "excidisti enim te ipsum . . . solum te ab omnibus abstinuisti" (ap. Cyp. Ep. lxxv. 24).

<sup>3</sup> Cyp. Ep. lxxviii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> "constituimus in Pelagium atque Celestium per venerabilem episcopum Innocentium de beatissimi apostoli Petri sede prolatam manere sententiam" (ap. Prosper. con. Collatorem 5, Mansi Concil. IV, p. 376: the '214 bishops' go on to say "erravit sacrosancta beati Petri sedes quae ad universum orbem papae Zosimi ore loquitur," etc.).

copal authority, as must have already appeared, the popes of Rome have figured largely. The claim however of the Roman see, if more pressing than others, was but one instance of a tendency common to all the more important sees to arrogate to themselves power over other bishoprics or provinces. Some hints of this have already occurred in this lecture: but if the tendency is doubted, a typical instance is the rise of Constantinople from the seat of a simple provincial bishop to the second throne in Christendom, an instance of a rise due to aggrandizement and secular influence which cannot be gainsaid. And the net result of the tendency was to create by canonical authority four patriarchates in the east; to produce a system of church government by the despotic rule of a few instead of the freedom and equality of the earlier centuries; and to involve the church in bitter and fatal struggles between the rival patriarchs for power and precedence. With this we are not concerned, having satisfied ourselves that history bears no witness to any superior *magisterium* inherent in the patriarchs. If indeed some of their writings, as e.g. the Letters of St. Cyril and the Tome of St. Leo,

with the disciplinary canonical letters of certain eastern prelates<sup>1</sup>, have been received as authoritative, this authority is not derived from the position of their sees but from conciliar sanction and beyond that—in the case of St. Leo and St. Cyril<sup>2</sup>—from that final ratification, which is the sanction of the conciliar decrees themselves and the final test of truth,—I mean universal acceptance by the church.

### iii

These words bring us back from our digression to our main argument; and we now come to that final conclusion, the necessary corollary of the synodal system: viz. that while bishops, whether as individuals or assembled in councils, have the teaching power (*magisterium*) or power to utter, it is the general consent of the whole church which is the final criterion

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius, Peter, Athanasius, Timothy, Theophilus, and Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory Thaumaturgus, St. Basil, Gregory Nyssen, Gregory Nazianzen, Amphilochius of Iconium and Gennadius of Constantinople.

<sup>2</sup> These received the sanction of the council of Chalcedon, the other canonical epistles that of the Quinisext council—but the disciplinary decrees of the latter council were only by degrees accepted in the west.

of the truth, as is expressed in the famous Vincentian canon, which the English church justly regards as the stronghold of its position—that only is to be received as truth *de fide* which has been received *ubique, semper, et ab omnibus*. The voice of the general council must like St. Paul's "commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God <sup>1</sup>." For indeed the bishops do not compose the church: and a *vox ecclesiae* must be the utterance of the whole body. The bishops by themselves, even the whole assembly of bishops in a general council, which is the highest court of legislative appeal, are not exempt from error. That a 'plenary council' can err, or at least be corrected, is the teaching of St. Augustine, who admits at the conclusion of the passage which we quote for the fourth time: "who does not know that plenary councils themselves are frequently corrected, the former by later ones, when by some actual experience what was closed is opened and what lay hid is made known <sup>2</sup>?" A belief which held its ground till the end of the middle

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> "ipsaque plenaria concilia saepe priora posterioribus emendari, cum aliquo experimento rerum aperitur quod clausum erat et cognoscitur quod latebat" (*de Bapt.* ii. 4).

ages—witness the sermon of d'Ailly before the council of Constance on Christmas day 1414: "Although the Pisan council is believed with probability to have represented the universal church which is ruled by the Holy Spirit and cannot err: still every Christian is not bound to believe that that council could not err, seeing that there have been many former councils accounted general, which, we read, have erred. For according to some great doctors a general council can err not only in deed, but also in law and what is more in faith: for it is only the universal church which has the privilege that it cannot err in faith<sup>1</sup>." And this opinion is borne out by the facts of history. Synods came to different conclusions about the observance of Easter, and different uses prevailed, but ultimately the gradual consent of Christendom settled down into one use. The African and Asiatic churches maintained their practice as to the baptism of heretics as against the church of Rome, but in the end the judgements of their synods were reversed or at least greatly modified. It may be said that on both these points general councils subsequently legislated—but who

<sup>1</sup> trans. in Creighton *History of Papacy* i. p. 271.

decided which were the general councils? A council that had but little claim to represent the whole church, the first of Constantinople, has been enrolled among the general councils, while many councils which at the time were intended to be or claimed to be ecumenical have not been accepted as such: to this day the Roman, Eastern, and Anglican churches disagree in their enumeration. On the other hand disciplinary canons were accepted as binding by the church—at least the church in the east—which were the work of small, local and even semi-Arian synods<sup>1</sup>. The canon of Holy Scripture itself for conciliar authority can only point to a local council—that of Carthage in 397<sup>2</sup>. In reality however its authority rests on the general *consensus* of the whole church. On that also rests the deference paid to doctors and fathers and the voice of antiquity. And it is that which gives the ultimate sanction to, which passes the final judgement—whether

<sup>1</sup> I refer to the canons of Ancyra, Neocæsarea, Gangra, Antioch, Laodicea, Sardica, Carthage, which were all ratified by the 2nd canon of the Quinisext council.

<sup>2</sup> Even if the addition to the 6th canon of Laodicea is genuine, we only gain the authority of another local possibly unorthodox synod. Both synods however were confirmed by canon 2 of the Quinisext council.



of approval or disapproval—on, the teaching of the bishops. It is that which alone can make their voice the voice of the church.

So to sum up our conclusion: (1) The individual bishop has an *authenticum magisterium* or power to teach with *authority*, but it is a *magisterium* fenced in with limitations—the restriction of the sphere of authoritative teaching to the bearing witness to truth received, the evidence of Holy Scripture, of written laws and documents, and the witness of all other bishops and teaching authorities. Accordingly (2) for a *vox ecclesiae*, possessing the fullest authority and security of the Holy Spirit's guidance, we must look to the general *consensus* of the whole episcopal body, as expressed in an ecumenical synod. And (3) lastly, as even the whole episcopate does not make up the whole church, that the council's utterance should be a true 'voice of the church,' it must be ratified by the acceptance and general consent of the whole church, that is—to adopt an expression of Cardinal Franzelin in a more literal sense perhaps than was intended—"by the whole constitution and actions of the church as much in its daily life (if we may so say) as in its solemn functions<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> "tota constitutio et actus ecclesiae tam in vita (si ita

And we cannot do better than conclude by declaring with him that "the universal church of all ages and all places with its whole history is a great commentary in actual life upon, and a perpetual confirmation of, the true meaning which we catholics believe and demonstrate to be contained in the words of Christ and the apostles <sup>1</sup>."

loqui fas est) quotidiana quam in solemnibus gestibus" (*de Divina Traditione et Scriptura*, p. 97).

<sup>1</sup> "ecclesiam universam omnium aetatum et omnium locorum cum tota sua historia esse magnum commentarium realem ac perpetuam confirmationem veri sensus, quem in verbis Christi et apostolorum expressum catholici credimus et demonstramus" (*ibid.*).



**XII.**

**IV.**

**THE AUTHORITY OF GENERAL  
COUNCILS.**

**L**



No. XII.

## The Church Historical Society.

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## *The Authority of General Councils (IV).*

BY THE

REV. W. E. COLLINS, M.A.,

PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY AT KING'S COLLEGE,  
LONDON.

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# THE AUTHORITY OF GENERAL COUNCILS.

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Συναχθέντων ὑμῶν καὶ τοῦ ἑμοῦ πνεύματος σὺν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ  
Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.—1 Cor. v. 4.

TO-DAY, then, we start from the position that the bishops are the *normal* organ of the Church's teaching power. Not that they are the sole organ, for the whole Church, clergy and laity alike, and all our work and all our worship should be one great united voice of the faith. But the bishops are the *normal*, regular organ of the Church's voice<sup>1</sup>; it is they who are commissioned to strike the chord to which the whole body is to respond. And this in itself is a thing of no small importance for our own day, be it observed, seeing that some people seem to be under the impression that the real function of the bishop—the ἐπίσκοπος—is to shut his eyes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the preamble to the Creed of Eusebius in Socr. *H. E.* i. 8 καθὼς παρελάβομεν παρὰ τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν ἐπισκόπων κ.τ.λ.



and stop his ears to anything which he cannot approve.

We have been led to our position by the study of the actual practice of the Church of the Fathers. And indeed, whatever attempts may have been made in later days to minimise this function of the bishop, either by the setting up of an infallible oracle, or by the abolition of a teaching authority altogether, there can be no question that from the second century onwards (to use Dr. Hatch's words) "the bishop was conceived as having what S. Irenaeus calls the *charisma veritatis* (the sure gift of the truth); the bishop's seat was conceived as being, what S. Augustine calls it, the *cathedra unitatis* (the seat of unity); and round the episcopal office revolved the whole vast system, not only of Christian administration and Christian organization, but also of Christian doctrine<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Hatch, *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 98 f. The Eastern view is given, e.g. in the Confession of Dositheus, Patriarch of Jerusalem, read at the Synod of Jerusalem in 1672, where, in *Decr. x*, amongst other functions of the bishop we are told that "καὶ τὸ ἱερὸν εὐαγγέλιον διδάσκει καὶ τῆς εἰσεβοῦς ὑπερμαχεῖ πίστεως" (ap. Kimmel, *Monum. Fidei Eccl. Orient.* vol. I, p. 442). For the Roman view see, e.g. *Canones et Decr. Conc. Trid.* Sess. v. cap. 2; Sess. xxiv. cap. 4; Melchior

But seeing that, as we have already ascertained in a previous lecture<sup>1</sup>, all teaching authority is ultimately of the nature of witness, it follows that the single bishop, speaking in the name of the Church, may fail, through prejudice or ignorance, or want of philosophic grasp, to express the true mind of the Church; for nobody has yet ventured to suggest that every bishop is infallible. In such a case it is obvious that it pertains to other bishops to set him right. And indeed, in general, collective action, rather than individual, is to be looked for, in matters which concern the faith, that out of the mouths of many witnesses every word may be established. For the guardianship of the faith is committed to the bishops, not individually only, but collectively<sup>2</sup>. "For we have," writes Bossuet, "two means of arriving at the knowledge of Catholic truth: the first, by the consent

Canus, *De Locis Theologicis*, v. 5 (Migne, *Cursus*, vol. I, p. 289); Regnier, *De Eccl. Christi*, Pars II, sect. i, argum. 5 (ib. III. 984). That it is difficult really to reconcile this with the modern Roman dogma goes without saying. See also Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, Part II, chap. iv, sect. 5.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Teaching Power of the Church*, No. X. of the Church Historical Society's publications.

<sup>2</sup> According to the famous, but hardly translateable, passage of S. Cyprian,—"*Episcopatus unus est, cuius a singulis in solidum pars tenetur*" (*De Cath. Eccl. Unit.* § 5).

of the Church at large; the second, by the Church assembled in ecumenical or general councils<sup>1</sup>." In other words, there is a *magisterium* of the *Ecclesia congregata*; and it is this which we have to consider.

## I.

We have, most providentially, an account preserved to us in Holy Scripture of such combined action of the Church. The matter with which it was concerned might perhaps be described rather as one of discipline than as one of doctrine; but that does not matter for our purpose<sup>2</sup>. A difficulty had arisen at Antioch owing to certain from Judaea, who taught the Gentile Christians there that circumcision was essential. This

<sup>1</sup> *Def. Decl. Cler. Gallic.* lib. vii. c. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xv. The question of the faith—whether Gentiles could be admitted to the Church—had already been decided on the lines of divine revelation (Acts xi. 1-18). It was now to be settled what laws were binding upon Gentile Christians—whether or not they were to observe the Jewish Law. Cf. Ramsay, *S. Paul the Traveller*, p. 157: "The question, it must be clearly observed, was not whether non-Jews could be saved, for it was admitted by all parties that they could, but how they were saved: did the path of belief lie through the gate of the Law alone, or was there a path of belief that did not lead through that gate?"

naturally produced "no small dissension;" and ultimately it was decided to send delegates (Paul and Barnabas) to Jerusalem, in order to refer the question to the apostles and the elders there. They were received with joy by the Church; and, as the question still urgently needed settlement, "the apostles and the elders came together for to consider the matter," the conference being held before the whole Church. The matter was brought forward, and freely discussed, there being, as we read, much questioning (or investigation)<sup>1</sup>. At length (after others had expressed their views) the leading apostles spoke—Peter on the question of principle, then the delegates upon the facts, and lastly, James sums up the whole matter, apparently as president, by virtue of his position at the head of the Church at Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>, and proposes a definite course of action; and this course is accepted by "the apostles and the elders, with the whole Church." An agreement having been arrived at, it is embodied in a letter, written by the

<sup>1</sup> Πολλῆς ζητήσεως (verse 7).

<sup>2</sup> So S. Chrysostom (Cramer, *in loc.*). See the account of the Conference in Ramsay, *S. Paul the Traveller*, chap. vii, and Baumgarten, *Apostolic History*, sect. xxiv. (vol. II, p. 13 f). For the position of S. James, see Lightfoot on Gal. ii. 12; but cf. Weizsäcker, *Apostolic Age*, p. 199.

officers of the Church, "the apostles and the elders<sup>1</sup>," and affirming without doubt that their decision has the approval of the Holy Ghost. This letter is forthwith taken to Antioch by Paul and Barnabas, and two delegates from the Church at Jerusalem, and delivered to the Church there, being received with joy. Thence, we read, the decrees that were ordained by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> are taken by Paul and Barnabas to the Churches of Syria and Cilicia, and given to them "for to keep." And, although a party of Judaisers existed for generations more, the matter, so far as the Church is concerned, is at an end<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly the meaning; and the word ἀδελφοῖς may not improbably be a corruption.

<sup>2</sup> Τὰ δόγματα τὰ κεκριμένα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις (Acts xvi. 4).

<sup>3</sup> Roman writers have strangely exaggerated the naturally important position of S. Peter at this assembly into that of the president of a council, e.g. Bossuet, *Def. Decl. Cler. Gallic.* vii. 6: "Pierre entama la délibération, et dit le premier son avis; ce qui, dans la suite, a établi l'usage que les présidents des conciles ouvrirent les premiers leurs avis et que les décrets fussent conclus en premier lieu par leur autorité" (I quote from a French version of 1845). And Ballerini, *De potestate Summorum Pontificum et Conciliorum Generalium*, ii. § 1 (Migne, *Cursus*, vol. III, p. 1289): "In ea S. Petrus primus omnium sententiam tulit; alii autem omnes eamdem amplexi, unam cum eo definitionem

Now it is quite true that there are differences between this apostolic gathering at Jerusalem and the councils of later days. But for my present purpose it is enough to notice what is common to both, viz. the principle that when dissensions arise owing to the action of single teachers, they are to be met and put an end to by means of the combined action of the Church. So long as there is no discordant utterance, the common witness of the Church is enough; but when discord arises, the Church may have to resort to combined action. And upon the working out of this principle is based the whole synodic system.

## II.

It grew comparatively slowly. Mutual action and co-operation was of course common from the first, but it only became conscious and formal as the result of a realized want. As there is no complete resemblance, so there is no direct historical connexion between the Jerusalem assembly and the later councils. None the less, these are exemplifications of the

*edidère. Idem dicendum de Romanis pontificibus, qui eadem, qua Petrus, definiendi potestate atque auctoritate fruuntur."*

same principle. They are the logical and inevitable result of the existence of any organization at all, and of the fact that Church authority is based on witness. And to those who remember that the Canon of Holy Scripture rests upon no synodic utterance<sup>1</sup>, but rather upon the consensus of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as shown in history, it will be an enhancement of the value of synodic action to remember that it rests upon a like basis.

As we should have expected, the earliest recorded instances of co-operation between bishops have to do with important matters of Church order. Letters of commendation, excommunications, and the like, imply common action, or they would in practice become nugatory. In fact, there is much to suggest that the meetings between bishops to consider such matters were the origin of regular synods of the bishops of a district<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Of course our present canon is virtually the same as that of the Council of Carthage in 397; that council, however, did not *make* the canon, but declared and recognized what was already in use. See Westcott, *Bible in the Church*, pp. 180-188.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Salmon, *Infalibility of the Church*, p. 283: "My belief is that it was the review of excommunications for ratification or rejection which constituted the chief

However that may be, there is clear evidence that assemblies of this kind were held as early as the second century<sup>1</sup>, and that their canons or decisions came to be regarded as having the force of law in the Church<sup>2</sup>. And they are mentioned by Firmilian, Bishop of the Cappadocian Caesarea in the early part of the third century, as a regular annual thing: "Therefore it has become necessary that every year we elders and rulers should assemble to put in order what has been committed to our charge, that if there are matters of graver import, they may be regulated by common counsel<sup>3</sup>." And little over a century later, Eusebius speaks of them as essential. Here are his words: "The emperor [Licinius] made a law that the bishops should never on any account

business of the councils of neighbouring bishops, which we know to have met periodically in very early times."

<sup>1</sup> Haddan (*Dict. Chr. Ant.* vol. I, p. 473) dates their origin from the latter half of the second century. Tertullian (*De Pudic.* x.) says that the Shepherd of Hermas was always judged by every council of Churches to be false.

<sup>2</sup> This was doubtless a very gradual process. The individual bishop had a freedom of action which could not lightly be hampered. Cf. *S. Cypr. Ep.* lv. § 17; lxxii. § 3.

<sup>3</sup> *S. Cypr. Ep.* lxxv. 4 (*ut si qua graviora sunt, communi consilio dirigantur*).



communicate with one another, nor should any one of them absent himself on a visit to another Church, nor, lastly, should the holding of synods or councils for matters of common interest be allowed. Now this was clearly a pretext for displaying his malice against us; for we were compelled either to violate his law, and thus be subject to penalties, or else by obeying it to make void the laws of the Church, since it is impossible to settle important questions but by means of synods<sup>1</sup>."

Now this implies that the importance of conciliar action had grown in two ways. (1) As we have already observed, the early councils seem to have been concerned mainly, or entirely, with disciplinary matters. But already by the time of Tertullian it could be said that in them "all the deeper questions are dealt with for the common good<sup>2</sup>." And in the course of the second and third centuries, bishops<sup>3</sup>, such as Beryllus of Bostra and Paul of Samosata, were tried for heresy and deposed, and

<sup>1</sup> Eus. *Vit. Const.* i. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Tert. *De Ieiuniis*, c. 13, "per quae et altiora quaeque in commune tractantur."

<sup>3</sup> Eus. *H. E.* vi. 33; vii. 27-30.

heresies<sup>1</sup>, such as Montanism, were examined and condemned, for the security of the faith. (2) And secondly, the councils were often no longer small and local gatherings, but included considerable numbers of bishops, and these often of the greatest importance. Tertullian, in the passage above referred to, speaks of the councils in the East as being gathered "ex universis ecclesiis<sup>2</sup>;" which must imply some considerable magnitude. The synod which met at Rome to judge Novatian was "very great," consisting of sixty bishops<sup>3</sup>. The three councils which met at Antioch some years later to try Paul were perhaps smaller, but the bishops were far more important and came from all parts. "All the rulers of the Churches from all directions" came to Antioch, from Syria and Cappadocia and Pontus; and the great Dionysius of Alexandria was only prevented from coming by age and illness<sup>4</sup>. Two synods assembled by S. Cyprian, at Carthage in 256, contained respectively seventy-one and eighty-seven bishops, and great numbers of

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. *H. E.* v. 16, 24.

<sup>2</sup> His expression, "per Graecias," would seem to imply that such councils were not known in the West, or at least in Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Eus. *H. E.* v. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. vii. 27. 28.

priests and deacons, "a great part of the laity being also present."

Two things are to be observed with regard to the authority attributed to these synods<sup>1</sup>. (1) They claimed, like the individual teacher, to speak in the name of the whole Church, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Thus, for instance, the letter of the Council of Antioch which deposed Paul of Samosata was addressed "to all our fellow-ministers throughout the world, bishops, priests, and deacons, and to the whole Catholic Church under heaven;" and it declares that they have been compelled to excommunicate Paul, and "to appoint in his place another bishop of the Catholic Church<sup>2</sup>." And "at the suggestion of the Holy Ghost," or a similar phrase, is frequently prefixed to the decrees of even the earliest councils<sup>3</sup>. (2) And secondly, although each council claims to speak with the voice of the

<sup>1</sup> On both points see Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, II. ii. § 25 (vol. I, p. 308 f.). He points out that 'grundsätzlich ist jede Synode ein allgemeines Koncil,' so that the size of a council makes no difference in its nature. For the essential thing in every case is reception and ratification by the Church (Ib. pp. 314 f., 317, 327).

<sup>2</sup> Eus. H. E. vii. 30.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Carthage (252), and Arles (314). Other examples are given in Sohm, op. cit. vol. I, p. 310 f.

whole Church, and although its decisions are addressed to the whole Church, there is no certainty that they will be accepted by it. Elsewhere, councils proceed to discuss and pass canons upon the same subjects, and sometimes in a contrary sense, as for instance when the Churches of Italy and Africa are making canons about heretical baptism. In such a case "the extent to which a synod succeeds in enforcing its decisions depends upon the extent to which it obtains *de facto* recognition<sup>1</sup>." For even the area covered by the jurisdiction of a particular synod does not seem to be *definitely* settled till the earlier half of the fourth century<sup>2</sup>.

### III.

But the next great stage in the history of councils must be traced rather more at length. It occurred after the close of the great persecution of Diocletian (so-called), when the Edict of Milan had restored peace to the Churches. Constantine, although certainly not yet a Christian—it was only very

<sup>1</sup> A. Robertson, *Athanasius* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Library,) p. lxxv.

<sup>2</sup> By the Fifth Canon of Nicaea; and even this was not observed for at any rate a generation or two.

gradually that he accepted the Christian creed, and he was only baptized on his death-bed—was yet profoundly impressed with the grand monotheism of the Christian faith and the unity of the Church, and hoped great things from her as an agent in social reforms. Accordingly he took a keen interest in her welfare; and above all, realizing that her power as an agent for the reform of the empire depended upon her internal unity, he spared no pains to put an end to her discords. Accordingly, when the African Donatists appealed to him to decide their dispute with the Catholic Church, the emperor at once accepted the office<sup>1</sup>. In a letter to Melchiades, the Bishop of Imperial Rome, he deplors the fact that the people have followed “the baser course” of disunion, and directs that the matter shall be tried in the presence of the Bishops of Rome, Autun, Cologne, and Arles. For, says the emperor, “I have such reverence for the legalised Catholic Church

<sup>1</sup> He followed the precedent of the Emperor Aurelian, who, being appealed to when the heretical Paul of Samosata refused to give up the church buildings at Antioch, “ordered that they should be given to those to whom the bishops of Italy and of Rome should adjudge them” (*Eus. H. E.* vii. 30).

that I do not wish you to leave schism or division in any place<sup>1</sup>."

A council was accordingly held, fifteen Italian bishops being present in addition to the four mentioned by Constantine. The council decided against the Donatists, and their leader was condemned<sup>2</sup>. Donatus and his followers attempted an appeal to the emperor, but were sternly rebuked for behaving "like the heathen<sup>3</sup>." They continued to complain: but Constantine only referred them to the decision of the synod. As, however, from his point of view peace was before all else necessary, he at length gave way to their importunity, in the hope that the decision of a yet larger assembly might compel unanimity. He therefore wrote letters to the bishops throughout his dominions (i.e. the Western Empire), in which, after narrating the circumstances, he goes on:

<sup>1</sup> Eus. *H. E.* x. 5 τσαύτην με αἰδῶ τῇ ἐνθέσμῳ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀπονέμειν, ὥς μηδὲν καθόλου σχίσμα ἢ διχοστασίαν ἐν τινι τόπῳ βούλεσθαι με ὑμᾶς καταλιπεῖν. I take ἐνθέσμῳ to refer to the Edict of Toleration.

<sup>2</sup> S. Optatus, *De Schism. Donat.* i. 22 f. (ap. Routh, *Rel. Sacr.* vol. IV, p. 280 f.).

<sup>3</sup> "O rabida furoris audacia: sicut in causis gentilium fieri solet, appellationem interposuerunt" (Optatus, ut supr.).

"Wherefore it seemed to me necessary to provide that this dissension, which ought to have ceased after judgement had been given by their own voluntary agreement [i.e. in a council summoned with their consent], should now, if possible, be brought to an end by the agreement of many." To this end he has directed "very many bishops from different places innumerable<sup>1</sup> to assemble together at Arles to try the matter." Accordingly each bishop to whom the letter comes<sup>2</sup> is authorized to procure a state carriage, and to take with him two others "of the second rank" (i.e. priests) and three servants<sup>3</sup>, and come to Arles. The council was accordingly held. We do not know for certain how many bishops were present; the synodic epistle is signed by thirty-three only, and by other persons<sup>4</sup>; but more may have been there, and

<sup>1</sup> Eus. H. E. x. 5 *πλείστους ἐκ διαφόρων καὶ ἀμυθήτων τόπων ἐπισκόπους.*

<sup>2</sup> The letter given by Eusebius is addressed to Chrestus Bishop of Syracuse; but it is doubtless in substance that which was sent to every bishop.

<sup>3</sup> *Δύο . . . ἐκ τοῦ δευτέρου θρόνου . . . καὶ τρεῖς παῖδας τοὺς δηνησομένους ἑμὴν κατὰ τὴν ὁδόν.* Is it possible that this is a mistake of the quaestor who drew up the letter, and that three *διάκονοι* were intended?

<sup>4</sup> Also by fifteen presbyters, twenty-five deacons, two readers, and seven exorcists.

indeed in the later traditions the number has grown to six hundred. But never had any synod been so representative as this—bishops were there from Aquileia, and Capua, and Milan, from Treves, and Cologne, and Rheims, not to speak of Emerita in Spain, Carthage, and three bishops from Britain. It represented the whole West as no synod had ever done before.

Some ten years later the rise of the Arian heresy in Egypt once more called out Constantine's energies. Alexander the Pope of Alexandria had already made attempts to put it down, but without much effect: and it came to the knowledge of the emperor. So as soon as, by the defeat of Licinius, he had become lord of the whole empire, he wrote a letter to Alexander and Arius, exhorting them to come to some agreement about a matter which is really of little moment<sup>1</sup>, and upon which indeed they are really at one<sup>2</sup>. And his object in all this is, he says, "first, to bring the diverse judgments of all nations respecting the Deity to a state of settled uniformity; and secondly, to restore to health the system of the world"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Eus. Vit. Const.* ii. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* c. 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* c. 65.



But the evil was greater, as Eusebius says, than could be overcome by a single epistle<sup>1</sup>; and as there were other questions causing differences in the Church at this time, Constantine resorted again to his former plan, and summoned the bishops from all quarters (i.e. this time of the *whole* Church)<sup>2</sup> to meet at Nicaea, again providing that the expense of their journeys should be borne by the State. And thus then met the First General Council.

#### IV.

Now I have purposely given at some length the circumstances which led to the calling of the Council of Nicaea, in order to make it clear that that council is not the working out of an idea that was *consciously* before the mind of the Church, but a new departure introduced from without. So far as I know, there is not a word to suggest that the idea had occurred to anybody before the beginning of the fourth century. It was the great Constantine who originated this plan for bringing all the bishops together, in order

<sup>1</sup> Eus. *Vit. Const.* ii. c. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Both Eusebius (*Vit. Const.* iii. 6) and Socrates (*H. E.* i. 8) call it *oikouμενικήν*.

that they might agree upon something, and so make an end of controversy. Arles and Nicaea alike had this as their aim: the former had failed because after all but half the world had been represented; Nicaea seemed, even to the emperor himself, to have succeeded. Here was an end of controversy. Accordingly, after the council he wrote to tell the Alexandrians that the bishops had met; that "we have received from Divine Providence the inestimable blessing of being delivered from all error, and united in the acknowledgement of one and the same faith;" and that "all points which seemed on account of ambiguity to furnish ground for debate have been considered and accurately examined<sup>1</sup>."

I am not saying, of course, that no other had any voice in the matter. On the contrary, it is highly probable that his friend Hosius the Bishop of Cordova shared in his confidence. It is known that Hosius was the bearer of the emperor's letter to Alexander and Arius<sup>2</sup>; he has a better claim than any other bishop to be considered the President of the Council of Nicaea; and indeed Sulpitius Severus seems to imply that it was he who suggested

<sup>1</sup> Socr. *H. E.* i. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. *H. E.* i. 7.

the summoning of the council <sup>1</sup>. But there can I think be no question that the plan is Constantine's own. Nor should this surprise us; for such a thing had hardly been within the bounds of possibility until Constantine's accession, and even then would have been quite impossible without his co-operation. The suggestion then came from Constantine: but the thing itself produced the most profound impression upon the whole Church, and at once commended itself to the mind of the Church, as being the complete realization of that co-operation and fellowship which was of her very essence, and which had already found a partial exemplification in the local synods of earlier days. There was one change, indeed, and an important one: whereas, to Constantine's mind, the bishops were engaged upon settling the faith once for all, they realized, more or less clearly, that they were witnessing to the faith which had been delivered once for all. To sum up then, we must realize that "the conception of a General Council did not give rise to Nicaea, but *vice versa* <sup>2</sup>." Here, as elsewhere, the facts pre-

<sup>1</sup> Sulp. Sev. *Hist.* ii. 40. 5: "Nicaena synodus auctore illo (Osio) confecta habebatur."

<sup>2</sup> A. Robertson, *Athanasius*, p. lxxv.

ceded the theory, and the theory was based upon already existing facts.

It would be hard to exaggerate the impression of awe and reverence produced upon the Christian imagination by the Council of Nicaea—and this in spite of some facts which might have had a contrary effect. Eusebius<sup>1</sup>, for instance, tells us that it was a scene of violent controversy; and Socrates<sup>2</sup> adds that the emperor gave the bishops an object-lesson in forgiveness by destroying the written charges which some of them had handed in against one another. None the less, Eusebius himself, and others who were actually present, were deeply moved by it, and realized that “the proceeding was the work of God<sup>3</sup>.” And he goes on to speak of it thus<sup>4</sup>:—“The most distinguished of God’s ministers from all the Churches which abounded in Europe, Asia, and Africa were here present. And a single Church, as though dilated by God, sufficed to contain at once Syrians and Cilicians, Phoenicians and Arabians, representatives from Palestine and from Egypt; Thebans and Libyans, with the dwellers of Mesopotamia. A Persian bishop was

<sup>1</sup> Eus. *Vit. Const.* iii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Soer. *H. E.* i. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Eus. *Vit. Const.* iii. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. iii. 7, 8.

present at the council, nor was even a Scythian found wanting, . . . . and the most celebrated of the Spaniards took his place among the rest. The prelate of the imperial city was prevented from attending by old age; but his presbyters were present and supplied his place. Constantine is the first prince who has bound together such a garland as this with the ligature of peace, and presented it to his Saviour . . . . thus exhibiting in our own times a similitude of the apostolic company. For it is told us that in the Apostles' age there were gathered 'devout men from every nation under heaven.' But that assembly was less, in that all who composed it were not ministers of God; but in the present company the number of bishops exceeded two hundred and fifty<sup>1</sup>, whilst that of presbyters and deacons in their train, and the crowd of acolytes and other attendants, was quite beyond counting." Nor does Eusebius by any means stand alone. S. Atha-

<sup>1</sup> The number is elsewhere stated by Eustathius as over 270 (*Theodoret, H. E. i. 8*); by Constantine (*Socr. H. E. i. 9*) and S. Athanasius (*de Decr. 3*) as over 300; and by Socrates (*H. E. i. 8*), S. Gregory of Nazianzus (*Orat. xxi. 14*), and others as 318. S. Athanasius gives the number variously in different passages.

nasius<sup>1</sup> and every writer of the period refers to it with the greatest possible respect; and however much Arians might try to get behind its decision, they did not attempt for many years to repudiate it, so far as I am aware. This however was largely owing to their fear of Constantine. And if we had to judge from one fact alone, the very continuance of the Arian controversy subsequent to the Council of Nicaea is enough to show that no such ideas of the finality of a General Council as are now current were then held in the Church<sup>2</sup>. Any suggestion that a council constituted in a particular manner must *ipso facto* decide rightly would have been scouted not only by Arius but by Athanasius himself<sup>3</sup>. Let us then try to estimate the authority which was attributed to the council in the century in which it was held.

To begin with, the council itself claimed to speak in the name of the whole Church, just

<sup>1</sup> S. Athanasius calls it the Ecumenical Council (*ad Ep. Aegypti*, § 5), the Great Council (*de Decr.* § 26), and the Ancient Council (*de Synodis*, § 20), as contrasted with the modern Arian councils.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sohm, *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 330 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism*, 50 n: "his writings (i.e. of Athanasius) give us no trace of the theory of conciliar infallibility."

as earlier local ones had done, and with the full conviction that God had guided it<sup>1</sup>. And the decisions of a council of such great size were naturally accepted with more reverence, and over a far larger area, than those of earlier local councils. But many facts can be adduced to show that this range had its limits. Thus the orthodox S. Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catecheses*, written some twenty-three years after the council, never so much as mentions its creed by name; and only refers to it once in a rather disparaging way<sup>2</sup>. More significant still, even when we bear in mind how few Western bishops were present at the Council<sup>3</sup>, is the fact that S. Hilary had never heard the Creed until just before his exile<sup>4</sup>, although this was thirty years after

<sup>1</sup> The emperor indeed, in his exaggerated reverence, attributes infallibility to it: "Even had they been unlearned men, yet as being illuminated by God, and the grace of the Holy Spirit (i.e. through their holy orders), they were utterly unable to err from the truth" (Socrates, *H. E.* i. 9).

<sup>2</sup> S. Cyr. Hieros. *Catech.* v. 12; cf. Gwatkin op. cit. p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> "We can only trace seven bishops from the West; and in any case there cannot have been very many" (Gwatkin op. cit. p. 36, note 2).

<sup>4</sup> S. Hil. *de Synodis*, p. 395 (*Ed.* Paris, 1652): "regeneratus pridem et in episcopatu aliquantis per manens, fidem Nicaeam nunquam nisi exulaturus audivi." Hilary was consecrated Bishop of Poitiers in 353, and exiled about 356.

the council, and he had then been a bishop for some time.

More instructive still is it to notice S. Athanasius's attitude towards the council. He thankfully recognizes that it has been guided aright in its decisions: but had it decided otherwise he would have been the first to blame it for so doing<sup>1</sup>. Its merit in his eyes is that it did not decide anything new, but simply stated what was already the faith of the Church. "They wrote concerning Easter, 'It seemed good as follows'; for it did then seem good that there should be a general compliance; but about the faith they wrote not 'It seemed good,' but 'Thus believes the Catholic Church'; and thereupon they confessed how they believed, in order to show that their own sentiments were not novel but apostolical<sup>2</sup>." And therefore it is, not on account of any inherent authority of the council itself, that he wrote of the Arians<sup>3</sup>, "Had they believed aright, they would have been satisfied with the confession put forth at Nicaea by the whole ecumenical

<sup>1</sup> He actually does express disapproval on one point (*Apol. c. Arianos*, § 71). For Athanasius's whole attitude towards the council see Gwatkin op. cit. p. 50, note 3, and Robertson's *Athanasius*, pp. lxxv. lxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> *de Synodis*, § 5.

<sup>3</sup> *ad Episc. Aegypti*, § 5.



synod." "Vainly," he writes again, "do they run about with the pretext that they demanded councils for the faith's sake: for Divine Scripture is sufficient above all things; but if a council be needed on the point, there are the proceedings of the Fathers: for the Nicene bishops did not neglect this matter, but stated the doctrine so exactly, that persons reading their words honestly, cannot but be reminded by them of the religion towards Christ announced in the Divine Scriptures<sup>1</sup>." It is only because they "preserve the teaching of the Fathers" that the bishops at Nicaea are said to have "done all that was needful for the Catholic Church<sup>2</sup>." If in one passage he speaks of "contending against an Ecumenical Council" as equivalent to "disobedience to fathers<sup>3</sup>," he balances it by another, showing that Nicaea is not to be preferred before the earlier synod of Antioch, or *vice versa*; since both alike did nothing new, but fell back upon the words of those who went before them<sup>4</sup>. And if we turn from the majestic freedom of the Eastern theologian to the more logical and formal precision of Italy (for such it has

<sup>1</sup> *de Synodis*, § 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* § 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* § 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* § 46.

always been), Julius of Rome accords with his brother-pope of Alexandria: he declares indeed that "a general council ought not to be set aside by a few individuals," but strongly upholds the power of one council to revise the decisions of another<sup>1</sup>.

With the gradual extinction of the heresy, however, there came a change. As Arianism was proved to be false, on grounds of Scripture, reason, and history, men's minds turned with more and more of reverence to the great assembly which had laid down the lines so truly from the beginning. "To that council," writes S. Athanasius in 369, "the whole world has long ago agreed. . . . The word of the Lord which came through the Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea abides for ever<sup>2</sup>." The mind of the whole Church, in other words, had found rest in the decrees and creed of the council.

## V.

And henceforth it was on all sides accepted that in such a council the Church spoke her mind with the fullest authority and weight.

<sup>1</sup> See Julius's letter in *Ath. Apol. c. Ar.*; especially §§ 22, 25.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ath. *ad Afros Ep. Synodica*, §§ 1, 2.

Some might still think it a necessary evil: and indeed it is obvious that it was a grievous interference with the work of the Church, and that but for human imperfections it would be unnecessary. Thus the letter of the bishops at Sardica speaks of the assembling of a great council as nothing less than a tempest (*procella*)<sup>1</sup>. And S. Gregory of Nazianzus, whose pacific disposition and rather fastidious taste eminently unfitted him for them, and whose experiences of them were certainly unfortunate, declared, after the Council of Constantinople in 381, "If I must write the truth, I am disposed to avoid every assembly of bishops; for of no synod have I seen a profitable end, but rather an addition to than a diminution of evils; for the love of strife and the thirst for superiority are beyond

<sup>1</sup> S. Hilar. *Fragm.* iii. *ex op. hist.* p. 475 (ed. Paris, 1652): "Talem mundo tempestatis procellam induxerunt, ut orientem prope totum occidentemque turbarent, ut relinquentes singuli ecclesiasticas curas populosque Dei deferentes, atque ipsam Euangelii doctrinam postponentes, de longinquo adueniremus senes aetate graues, corpore debiles, aegritudine infirmi, trahebamurque per diuersa, nostrosque aegrotantes in itineribus deserebamus propter perpaucos scelestos olim digne damnatos, primatus ecclesiae contra fas appetentes . . . Omnis etenim fraternitas omnibus in prouinciis suspensa ac sollicita expectat in quem finem haec malorum procella succedat."

the power of words to express<sup>1</sup>." But however much particular bishops may have disliked the necessity for General Councils, that necessity was felt universally; and in times of storm and stress they seemed the natural resource for the solution of difficult questions. And so Constantinople succeeded to Nicaea, and Ephesus to Constantinople, and Chalcedon to Ephesus, with a host of other assemblies between, which aspired to the same great name and authority.

For nobody in this age would have suggested for a moment that there was any other body in the Church which could even compare in authority with her bishops assembled in council. In the letter of Julius of Rome already referred to, he claims for himself a considerable personal authority, but he expressly bases it upon the canons, and never dreams of comparing it with the authority of the council<sup>2</sup>. S. Ambrose, referring to the decrees of Nicaea, says, "Let us therefore keep the precepts of the elders, lest we should rashly break the hereditary

<sup>1</sup> S. Greg. Naz. *Epist.* cxxx. Procopio. The passage is discussed by Regnier (*De Eccl. Christi*, Pars I, sect. ii, cap. 6) and Salmon (*Infallibility of the Church*, pp. 297-301).

<sup>2</sup> See S. Ath. *Apol. c. Ar.*, especially §§ 25, 35; and cf. Socrates, *H. E.* ii. 17.

seals<sup>1</sup>;" and elsewhere he declares that neither death nor the sword should separate him from the Nicene Council<sup>2</sup>. When S. John Chrysostom was unlawfully expelled from his see, Innocent of Rome wrote to his clergy that a General Council was needed to put the matter right, and that he was considering how it might be obtained<sup>3</sup>; and he presently became a suitor to the emperors for this purpose, but in vain<sup>4</sup>. "Who does not know," writes S. Augustine, "that the very councils, whether of provinces or eparchies" (which, he has just said, have power to censure bishops), "themselves yield without any hesitation to the authority of plenary councils which are assembled out of the whole Christian world<sup>5</sup>?" Once more, to quote S. Vincent, men are to follow "the decrees of a General Council, if there be any; and if not, let them follow

<sup>1</sup> S. Ambr. *de Fide*, lib. iii. c. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. *Epist.* xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Sozomen, *H. E.* viii. 26 καὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς πολλὰ σκεπτόμεθα, ὅν τρόπον ἡ σύνοδος οἰκουμένης συναχθείη, κ.τ.λ.

<sup>4</sup> Ib. viii. 28.

<sup>5</sup> S. Aug. *de Bapt.* ii. 4; cf. *Ep.* xliii. 19, and S. Ath. *ad A/ros Ep. Synodica*, § 2: "the assembly at Nicaea is more than those at local synods, inasmuch as the whole is greater than the part."

what stands next; namely, the sentences of many and great doctors agreeing together<sup>1</sup>."

Nor is there any material change for centuries afterwards. By the time of S. Leo the Papacy had grown greatly in its pretensions<sup>2</sup>: but none the less in a letter to Theodoret, after the Council of Chalcedon, he thanks God that "what He first defined by our ministry He had given force to (*firmavit*) by the unalterable assent of all the brethren, to show that what had been shaped by the first see of all, and had received the judgement of the whole Christian world, proceeded from Himself<sup>3</sup>." And a little while later we have language used which is yet more remarkable. The decrees of the councils had already one by one received the force of laws; but in 545 the Emperor Justinian not only re-affirmed this, but added the statement that he received the dogmas of these four councils as the Holy Scriptures<sup>4</sup>. And Pope Gregory the Great, to whom under God we owe so much of the conversion

<sup>1</sup> *Commonitorium*, c. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. Langen, *Geschichte d. römischen Kirche*, vol. II, p. 104 f.; Hussey, *Rise of the Papal Power*, Lecture II.

<sup>3</sup> S. Leo. *Ep.* cxx. ad Theodoretum; cf. *Ep.* lxxviii.

<sup>4</sup> *Novell.* 131. 1; cf. *Cod. Justin.* I. i. 7.

of England, writes: "I confess that I receive and venerate, as the four books of the Gospel, so also the four councils . . . and the fifth council also I equally venerate<sup>1</sup>." And it is impossible to avoid a smile when we find S. Isidore of Seville declaring that the reason why the Church before Constantine's time was so divided and rent asunder by heresies is that there was then no General Council<sup>2</sup>.

## VI.

So much with regard to the way in which General Councils were revered in the fourth and following centuries. But I have already pointed out that within this period there were several which aspired to the description but have not generally received it, as since then there have been many more. It therefore becomes necessary to inquire what assemblies are entitled to this august name.

(a) To begin with, it must be borne in mind that the name itself only gradually acquired fixity of use. For instance, S. Augustine speaks of the Council of Arles as a "plenary council of the whole Church," although, as

<sup>1</sup> S. Greg. Magn. *Epp.* lib. i, no. 25, ad Ioann. Const. Ep.; cf. lib. iv, no. 38. ad Theodelind.

<sup>2</sup> *ap.* Labbe, *Concilia*, vol. I, col. 5.

we saw, it included bishops from the West only<sup>1</sup>. And other instances might be given of the same thing<sup>2</sup>. (b) Then again, certain other councils to which the bishops from all parts were summoned, cannot lay claim to the title because of their paucity of numbers; e.g. that of Tyre in 335<sup>3</sup>. (c) Again, many councils, which, by their numbers, as well as by the fact of being summoned from the whole Church, might fairly claim to be admitted to the list, are excluded on one ground or another. Thus the Council of Sardica was quite as representative as Nicaea<sup>4</sup>, but has never been ranked as a General Council, largely because it issued no decree in matters of faith, and therefore has had no permanent value in the Church<sup>5</sup>. And the Council of Ariminum, which was considerably larger than any previous coun-

<sup>1</sup> S. Aug. *de Bapt.* ix. 14. It seems clear that he must mean Arles and not Nicaea, from the parallel passage in *Ep.* xliii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the third Council of Toledo, in 627, calls itself "universalis" in Canon xviii. (where Bruns and other editors read *venerabilis*).

<sup>3</sup> Eus. *Vit. Const.* iv. 40-42. It contained some sixty bishops, besides those from Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> See the list of provinces represented, in Hefele, *History of Councils*, vol. II, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Hefele, vol. I, p. 56; vol. II, pp. 172-6.



cil<sup>1</sup>, actually betrayed the faith. (d) And once more, the Council of Constantinople in 381 was perhaps summoned only as an Eastern Council<sup>2</sup>; certainly only Eastern bishops were present<sup>3</sup>, and they to the number of one hundred and fifty only<sup>4</sup>; and yet it has always been accounted a General Council<sup>5</sup>.

This summary of facts might easily be amplified by extending it to the various assemblies of the fifth century: but what we have said will suffice to prove that the mere fact of bishops assembling in great numbers, or assembling from all parts of the world, is not enough to constitute such a council as will be *ipso facto* recognized by the whole Church; and *vice versa*, a council may be so recognized by the whole Church even though it be lacking in more of these points than one. Indeed, I think it would be quite true to say that there has

<sup>1</sup> "More than four hundred bishops were present" (S. Ath. *de Synodis*, c. 8).

<sup>2</sup> Theodoret, *H. E.* v. 6.

<sup>3</sup> The most westerly name mentioned is that of Ascholi of Thessalonica.

<sup>4</sup> So Gregory of Nazianzus.

<sup>5</sup> It is so called by the synod which met at Constantinople the following year (Theodoret, *H. E.* v. 8).

never been a council which could really and strictly claim to represent the whole Church: at the best they have been but approximations. In some cases the West has been represented almost exclusively, in some cases the East; whilst since the schism of East and West it is of course obvious that no council could be held which should really represent the Church Catholic. And moreover, we must bear in mind that no such assembly could do more than represent the majority in the Church of the day; and it is the Church in her "length and breadth and depth and height" which is infallible.

And if the constitution of such a General Council has often been at fault, it must be acknowledged that its temper has often been very unjudicial<sup>1</sup>. Even at the apostolic gathering at Jerusalem we seem to have an indication that the body of those present endeavoured to talk all at once<sup>2</sup>. That there was much contention at Nicaea we have already observed. At Ephesus the disorder was far worse; the Egyptian bishops

<sup>1</sup> On this fact, and its explanation, see the wise words of Milman, *Latin Christianity*, vol. I, pp. 201-4.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xv. 7 πολλῆς ζητήσεως γενομένης; verse 12 ἐσίγησε δὲ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος.

The first letter is dated 1877, and is  
 signed by the author and his wife, and is  
 addressed to the Rev. Dr. J. J. Smith, of  
 the University of Toronto, Canada.  
 The second letter is dated 1878, and is  
 signed by the author and his wife, and is  
 addressed to the Rev. Dr. J. J. Smith, of  
 the University of Toronto, Canada.  
 The third letter is dated 1879, and is  
 signed by the author and his wife, and is  
 addressed to the Rev. Dr. J. J. Smith, of  
 the University of Toronto, Canada.

means free from similar scenes of excitement<sup>1</sup>. In truth, however, it is easy to make far too much of matters of this kind: only they may fairly be used to emphasize the fact that councils are far better fitted to be *witnesses* to the Faith than they would be to be *sources* of the Faith. In Dr. Salmon's words, "if they are entitled to less respect as judges, they are all the better witnesses<sup>2</sup>."

I have shown that it is impossible to define easily the *criteria* of a General Council, since some are refused for lack of numbers, some for lack of ecumenicity, some because they have given no decision concerning the faith, some because they have erred. Consequently it has been at all times debated whether any such *criteria* can be found. Our own Richard Field, for instance (who was Dean of Gloucester, 1610-16) declares, following earlier writers, that three conditions are necessary. "The first is, that the summons be general, and

<sup>1</sup> Manning, *True Story of the Vatican Council* (*Nineteenth Century*, vol. I, p. 608): "On two occasions the speaker tried the self-control of his audience beyond its strength. Strong and loud expressions of dissent were made, and a very visible resentment, at matter not undeserving of it, was expressed." The same thing has been stated much more strongly.

<sup>2</sup> Salmon, *Infallibility of the Church*, p. 286.

such as may be known to all the principal parts and provinces of the Christian world. The second, that no bishop, whencesoever he come, be excluded, if he be known to be a bishop, and not excommunicate. The third, that the principal patriarchs be present with the concurrence of the particular synods under them, either in person, or by their substitutes or vicars<sup>1</sup>." But it may well be doubted whether this definition would cover the First Council of Constantinople, to say nothing of the second: and we should at once have to enlarge it by allowing the subsequent ratification of an absent patriarch to serve instead of his presence, as Bellarmin does, at least in the case of the Bishop of Rome<sup>2</sup>. The great Spanish theologian Melchior Canus, again, discusses whether a general summons is enough, or whether a general assembly is necessary likewise. Are we to account it general, for instance, if only ten bishops turn up, and they from Italy? (Or, we may add, only thirty or forty, as was the case during the earlier stages of the Council of Trent<sup>3</sup>?)

<sup>1</sup> Field, *Of the Church*, vol. IV, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Bellarmin, *de Conciliis et Ecclesia*, i. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Froude, *Lectures on the Council of Trent*, pp. 173, 188. For further details see Philippson, *La Contre-Révolution*, pp. 306-309.

Or, on the other hand, if one bishop negligently stays away, does this prevent its being General? The conclusion that he comes to is, that both a general summons and a general assembly are necessary, and that in either case the consent of the whole Church is the sole and final judge<sup>1</sup>.

## VII.

And thus we are once more brought round to the consent of the whole Church as the final test of the ecumenicity of a council. I believe there is none other that can be given ; and I am certain that there is none other which will satisfy every particular case. That is a General Council which is so accounted by the Church ; and that which is not so accounted is not a General Council. With S. Gregory, we accept them because they are based upon universal consent<sup>2</sup>. We look for the mind of the Church in them. With Dr. Field we

<sup>1</sup> Melchior Canus, *de Locis Theologicis*, v. 3 "Communi enim fidelium sensu agendum est, cum de rebus vocibusque ecclesiae loquimur. . . . Nec satis est tamen ad generale concilium evocatio generalis, nisi sit etiam generalis congregatio. Sed ad generalem congregationem omnium episcoporum congregatio non requiritur."

<sup>2</sup> "Universali constituta consensu" (S. Greg. *Epp.* lib. i, no. 25). See an interesting letter in Dr. Hort's *Life and Letters*, vol. ii. p. 434 f.

hold that "General Councils are the best means for preserving of unity of doctrine, severity of discipline, and preventing of schisms, when they may be had; and though they be not absolutely necessary to the being of the Church, yet they are most behoveful for the best, readiest, and most gracious governing of the same; and howsoever there may be a kind of exercise of the supreme jurisdiction that is in the Church by the concurrence of particular synods, and the correspondence of several pastors, upon mutual intelligence of the sense, judgement, and resolution of every one of them, yet the highest and most excellent exercise of the supreme ecclesiastical jurisdiction is in General Councils<sup>1</sup>." And we look forward to the time when the consent of the whole Church, as expressed in a council, shall confirm both peace and truth in the Church.

But, at the same time, we recognize with S. Augustine that General Councils may err, and the earlier be corrected by the later<sup>2</sup>. With Waldensis we believe that not "that universal Church which is gathered together in a General Council" is infallible, since "we

<sup>1</sup> Field, *Of the Church*, vol. IV, pp. 5, 6. See Appendix A, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> S. Aug. *de Bapt.* ii. 5.

have found these to have erred sometimes<sup>1</sup>;" but "that Catholic Church which hath been dispersed throughout the whole world," and that faith which hath been held *ubique, semper, ab omnibus*. And therefore we affirm that at all times it is the duty of the faithful to "search the Scriptures daily, whether these things are so<sup>2</sup>." It is the duty of laity and clergy alike; for, as Field says, "the sheep of Christ, being reasonable, have and must have a kind of discerning whether they be directed into wholesome and pleasant pastures or not<sup>3</sup>." And it is a thing to rejoice in when an Athanasius stands up against a false General Council of Ariminium, and the English Church repudiates another at Trent, and some noble Bavarian theologians

<sup>1</sup> Waldensis, *Doctrinale Fidei*, lib. II, art. ii, cap. 19 (quoted in Field, *Of the Church*, vol. IV, p. 52). Cf. the speech of Cardinal D'Ailly at Constance: "According to some great doctors a General Council can err not only in deed but also in law, and, what is more, in faith; for it is only the universal Church which has the privilege that it cannot err in faith; according to that saying of Christ to Peter, not as regards himself nor his own personal faith, but as regards the faith of the universal Church, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.'" (Quoted in Creighton, *Hist. of the Papacy*, vol. I, p. 271.)

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvii. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Field, vol. IV, p. 10.





as general in different parts of the Church. Thus the English Church has recognized six such councils (although sometimes mention has only been made of four<sup>1</sup>); to these the Eastern Church adds two more<sup>2</sup>; whilst the Roman would more than double the number. Indeed, Roman Catholics do not agree among themselves as to the number of General Councils; and Bishop Hefele, their latest historian of councils, after stating the views of others, proceeds to give a corrected table of his own<sup>3</sup>. In such a case it is obvious that only those with regard to which there is, or shall come to be, an agreement, can claim to be regarded as real General Councils.

### VIII.

And now it only remains, in conclusion, to point out certain positions which have

<sup>1</sup> Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431, Chalcedon 451, Constantinople 553, Constantinople 680. The English Council of Hatfield, in 680, accepted the "Five General Councils," and that of Lateran in the time of Pope Martin (Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, vol. III, p. 141). And the Homily "Against Peril of Idolatry" speaks of the "six councils which were allowed and received of all men." For the witness of English writers, see Palmer, *Church of Christ*, part iv, chap. 9 (vol. II, p. 171 f.).

<sup>2</sup> Nicaea 787, and Constantinople 879.

<sup>3</sup> See Hefele, *History of Councils*, vol. I, pp. 55 f. 63.

been taken up on the matter which are open to objection.

(1) In the first place, it has been claimed that a General Council is of itself infallible. Against this error enough has surely been said already: we can no more admit the infallibility of councils, than we can the infallibility of bishops or of popes. The mechanical theory of conciliar infallibility must surely stand self-condemned, to anyone who is cognisant of the facts.

(2) It has been claimed that the Pope of Rome is the proper summoner of General Councils; and the Roman controversialist Bellarmin has wasted a great deal of energy in trying to prove that all the early councils were so summoned excepting the seventh, to which he promptly refuses the title. But without going into details here, it must be enough to state that the first eight were undoubtedly summoned by the emperors. In the eighth, indeed, it was publicly stated by the priest Elias, the legate of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, that this was so<sup>1</sup>. And it is acknow-

<sup>1</sup> "Scitote quia in praeteritis temporibus imperatores erant qui congregabant synodos ex toto terrarum orbe, &c." Quoted in Nicholas of Cusa, *De Concord. Cath.* iii. c. 13 (p. 793, ed. Basil. 1565). The passage does not appear to

ledged by Anastasius the Papal Librarian, by Nicholas of Cusa, by Ballerini, and even by Hefele, that some, at any rate, of these councils were summoned by the emperors, although later councils have indeed been summoned by popes.

(3) A word must be added with regard to the function of the emperors in this matter. They summoned the councils, because of the civil interests involved: they alone had the power. And it has been true ever since, that without the civil power no such assembly—not even the Vatican Council of twenty-five years ago, as Cardinal Manning himself acknowledges<sup>1</sup>—could have met. The declaration of our Article, that “General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes<sup>2</sup>,” is simply the statement of a fact. “I cannot see in reason,” writes Bishop Beveridge, “how General Councils should be gathered together without the command of princes, seeing

be in the *Acts* in Mansi, vol. XVII, although there are other passages to much the same purpose (e.g. the speech of Photius in col. 504).

<sup>1</sup> Manning, *True Story of the Vatican Council* (*Nineteenth Century*, vol. I, p. 129).

<sup>2</sup> Art. xxi. “sine iussu et voluntate Principum congregari non possunt”—cannot be gathered together.

princes only have the command over those that are to be gathered together in these councils<sup>1</sup>." But it has always been recognized, at least in theory,—by Constantine as by others—that the bishops are the judges. And if it was ever in danger of being forgotten, it was owing to the servility of the bishops.

(4) But at least, it is said, if the Pope does not summon it, a General Council cannot be held without his acquiescence. No doubt this is the modern Roman opinion; but if it means that the whole Church is powerless without him, it is easy to show *how* modern it is. The mediaeval theory of papal lordship, indeed, left little room for the activity of councils; and the councils of this period were, as a rule, mere papal receptions<sup>2</sup>. But as soon as the ground had been cleared by Occam and Marsiglio, the older view re-asserted itself in all its strength<sup>3</sup>. Nicholas of Cusa, for instance, writing in the fifteenth century, of course does not suggest that the chief bishop of the West should be left out (nor do we)<sup>4</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> Beveridge, *On the Articles*, p. 391 (Oxford, 1846).

<sup>2</sup> See *The Pope and the Council*, Chap. iii. § 11.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B, p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> There was indeed, according to Socrates (*H. E.* ii. 19), who is inexactly summarizing the letter of Julius given

but he declares that if the pope will not come, the council can at once proceed without him<sup>1</sup>. The witness of Cardinal Turrecremata is much the same. "If such a case should fall out," he says, "that all the fathers assembled in a General Council, with unanimous consent should make a decree concerning the faith, which the person of the pope alone should contradict<sup>2</sup>, I would say according to my judgement that men were bound to stand to the judgement of the synod, and

in S. Ath. *Apol. 2. Ar.*, an ancient custom to the effect that no canon was to be made for the whole Church without the Bishop of Rome. That this was claimed for him in the fifth century, then, we need not doubt. But it certainly was not held to mean that the Church was impotent in case of his failure; and any such idea would have been scouted in early days.

<sup>1</sup> *De Concord. Cath.* ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to notice how Ballerini disposes of the possible case of a pope who falls into manifest heresy, in order to avoid ascribing superiority to a council. He is to be admonished once and again; and this may be by the cardinals, or the Roman clergy, or indeed anybody, since "*caritatis, non iurisdictionis, officium est.*" If he will not repent, he is *ipso facto* cut off, and "*nulla cuiusquam declaratio aut sententia necessaria est.*" And "*postea vero manifestato eius recessu ab ecclesia, si quae sententia a concilio in eundem ferretur, in eundem ferretur, qui pontifex amplius non esset, neque superior concilio*" (*De Potest. summorum Pontif. &c.* ix. § 2; Migne, *Cursus*, vol. III, col. 1374). See Appendix C (p. 196c).

not to listen to the gainsaying of the person of the pope; for the judgement of so many and so great fathers in a General Council seemeth worthy to be preferred before the judgement of one man<sup>1</sup>." The great Spanish theologian Tostatus of Avila, speaks to much the same effect: that "Jesus Christ has established a tribunal higher than the pope; and this tribunal, viz. a General Council, has power to judge the pope, not only in causes of the faith, but in many other causes<sup>2</sup>." It is well known that the great theologian afterwards known as Pope Adrian VI. held a like opinion. The Gallican writer Edmond Richer actually made the superiority of councils to the pope a matter of faith: and although Bossuet rejects this, he strongly affirms it himself as a fact<sup>3</sup>. And more than all, it is notorious that the great Council of Constance, part of which is recognized as ecumenical by most Roman authorities, declared that it derived its power direct from our Lord, and that, representing the Catholic Church militant, all persons within the Church,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Field, vol. IV, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *Gallia Orthodoxa*, xxiv. (The Dissertation prefixed to his *Def. Decl. Cler. Gallic.*).

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* xvii; cf. *Def. Decl. Cler. Gallic.* lib. vi, cap. 24 f.

even the pope, were subject to its authority<sup>1</sup>.

With these matters I am not concerned in detail: it is enough for me to show how very slowly the most authoritative assembly of the whole Church came to be subjected to the growing power of the Bishop of Rome, until in our own day his infallibility has been made a matter of faith. I need hardly point out how such a claim stultifies all the earlier history of the Church, and reduces all the work of councils and synods, and all the careful study of earlier days, to mere nothingness: for what need of the study of "antiquity, universality, consensus," if there is an ever-present infallible authority which can produce cut-and-dried decrees in any emergency that may arise?

For our part, we have no desire to tempt others to set up an infallible bishop, by ourselves setting up an infallible council. We willingly remember that a council is not *necessarily* free from error: for we realize that the council is but a representation, so to speak, and a very imperfect one, of the whole Church. Once more, to quote

<sup>1</sup> Creighton, *History of the Papacy*, vol. I, p. 291f: cf. p. 443 f.



Thomas Netter of Walden, we recognize "that only the consent of the fathers from the beginning . . . is to be listened and hearkened unto (as free from danger of erring, and next in degree of authority to Holy Scripture); and that no man should think it strange that the fathers in all ages successively should be accounted more certain and infallible judges of faith than a General Council of bishops meeting at one time and in one place, seeing that so many wise, just, and holy fathers can neither be contained within the straits of one place, nor are in the world at one time, but were given successively by Almighty God to give testimony unto the faith in their successive times, in a constant and a perpetual course: all which fathers we may gather together, and consult at once, so often as we desire to consult them, and to be resolved by them in matters of difficulty and doubt, though they could never be all assembled unto one place, or meet together, when they lived in the flesh<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> *Doctrinale Fidei*, lib. II, art. ii, cap. 19 (quoted in Field, vol. IV, p. 53).

## APPENDIX A (p. 184).

“ CONCERNING those indifferent things, wherein it hath been heretofore thought good that all Christian churches should be uniform, . . . till now it hath been judged, that seeing the Law of God doth not prescribe all particular ceremonies which the Church of Christ may use; and in so great variety of them as may be found out, it is not possible that the law of nature and reason should direct all churches unto the same things, each deliberating by itself what is most convenient; *the way to establish the same things indifferent throughout them all must needs be the judgement of some judicial authority drawn into one only sentence, which may be a rule for every particular to follow.* And because such authority over all churches is too much to be granted unto any one mortal man, there yet remaineth *that which hath been always followed as the best, the safest, the most sincere and reasonable way; namely, the verdict of the whole Church orderly taken, and set down in the assembly of some general council*<sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book IV, chap. xiii. 8.

## APPENDIX B (p. 190).

THE theory of the definite superiority of the pope to a General Council only grew very slowly. I am not aware of any instance of its being formally and authoritatively asserted before the year 1518, when Leo X, in his Bull *Pastor Aeternus*, declared that "the pope has full and unlimited authority over councils: he can at his good pleasure summon, remove, or dissolve them <sup>1</sup>."

It would be impossible to trace the growth of the theory in detail here. But in addition to what has been said already, three points may be added:—

1. When Alexander III summoned the Lateran Council of 1179, he did so expressly in order that, in accordance with old custom, that should be done by many which could not well be done by an individual <sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The Bull is quoted, e. g. in Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Alexander III to the Bishops of Tuscany (Mansi, vol. XXII, col. 212): 'de diversis partibus personas

2. In the matter of Philippe Auguste of France, Pope Innocent III, one of the strongest popes who ever lived, distinctly recognized the superiority of a General Council to himself. Philippe was anxious to obtain a divorce from his wife; and, in the course of a long correspondence, which is on the whole highly creditable to the great Pontiff, Innocent refused to grant it, as the marriage was a perfectly valid one<sup>1</sup>. Thereupon Philippe made a further appeal to the Pope, and received the following answer: "Verum si super hoc absque generalis deliberatione concilii determinare aliquid tentaremus, prae-ter divinam offensam et mundanam infamiam, quam ex eo possemus incurrere, forsan ordinis et officii nobis periculum immineret, cum contra praemissam veritatis sententiam nostra non possit auctoritate dispensare<sup>2</sup>."

3. Even in the sixteenth century Melchior

ecclesiasticas decrevimus evocandas, quarum praesentia et consilio, quae fuerunt salubria statuuntur; et quod bonum, secundum consuetudinem antiquorum patrum, provideatur, et firmetur a multis. Quod si particulariter fieret, non facile posset plenum robur habere.'

<sup>1</sup> See his letters in Innoc. III. *Registr.* lib. xi. 181, to Philippe, and lib. xiii. 66, to the Queen (Migne, P. L. vol. cxxv. col. 1493; and vol. cxxvi. col. 258).

<sup>2</sup> *Registr.* lib. xv, no. 106, dated v Id. Jun. [1212] (Migne, P. L., vol. cxxvi, col. 612).

Canus, in discussing the nature of a council, strenuously upholds the right of the bishops to be true judges in it, and not merely assessors to the pope<sup>1</sup>. And in this he fairly represents the opinion of his day. And, as is well known, this is more or less the position of the great Gallican writers<sup>2</sup>.

## APPENDIX C (p. 191).

WITH the judgement of Cardinal Turrecremata and Pietro Ballerini respecting the treatment of an erring pope, it is interesting to compare that of an earlier churchman—Gerbert of Rheims, who himself became Pope Silvester II in 999 A.D. The occasion was as follows: Arnoul, the archbishop of Reims, had been degraded for treason to Hugh Capet, by a council of bishops and abbots presided over by Siguin, archbishop of Sens. Arnoul appealed to Rome; and Pope John XV suspended from his communion the bishops who

<sup>1</sup> Melchior Canus, *de Locis Theologicis*, lib. v, cap. 5, no. 2. This right is characteristically explained away by Ballerini, *De Potestate Summorum Pontificorum*, &c. ii. § 3.

<sup>2</sup> De Marca, *de Concord*, lib. v, capp. 8-12.

had taken part in the council. Thereupon Gerbert (who had been secretary to Arnoul, and was somewhat involved in his action—though not so seriously as Milman makes out<sup>1</sup>), wrote to Siguin repudiating the Papal action. The whole letter is striking; but the following may serve as a specimen:—"Roma dicitur esse, qui ea quae dampnatis, iustificet, et quae iusta putatis, dampnet. Et nos dicimus, quia Dei tantum, et non hominis est, ea quae videntur iusta dampnare, et quae mala putantur, iustificare . . . Quomodo ergo nostri emuli dicunt quia in Ar.[nulf]i deiectione, Romani episcopi iudicium expectandum fuit? Poteruntne docere, Romani episcopi iudicium, Dei iudicio maius est? Sed primus Romanorum episcopus inmo ipsorum apostolorum princeps clamat: 'Oportet oboedire Deo magis quam hominibus'<sup>2</sup>. Clamat et ipse *orbis terrarum magister*<sup>3</sup> Paulus 'Si quis vobis adnuntiaverit praeter quod accepistis, etiam angelus de caelo, anathema sit'<sup>4</sup>. Nun quia Marcellus papa Iovi tura incendit, ideo cunctis episcopis turificandum fuit? *constanter dico, quia si ipse Romanus episcopus in fratrem peccaverit,*

<sup>1</sup> *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. iii. p. 334 f.

<sup>2</sup> Acts v. 29.

<sup>3</sup> This title is worthy of notice.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. i. 9.

*sepiusque ammonitus, ecclesiam non audierit, his<sup>1</sup>, inquam, Romanus episcopus, praecepto Dei, est habendus sicut ethnicus et publicanus. Quanto enim gradus altior, tanto ruina gravior<sup>2</sup>."*

<sup>1</sup> i. e. is.

<sup>2</sup> Gerberti, *Epistolae*, 192 (ed. Havet). I have preserved the old spelling.

**XIII.**

**V.**

**ROMAN CLAIMS TO  
SUPREMACY.**

**P**





No. XIII.

## The Church Historical Society.

*President*:—THE RIGHT REVEREND J. WORDSWORTH, D.D.,  
LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

*Chairman*:—THE REVEREND W. E. COLLINS,  
PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY  
AT KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

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### *Roman Claims to Supremacy (v).*

BY THE

REV. A. ROBERTSON, D.D.,  
PRINCIPAL OF BISHOP HATFIELD'S HALL, DURHAM.

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# SUMMARY.

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## ROMAN CLAIMS TO SUPREMACY.

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Εγένετο δὲ καὶ φιλονεικία ἐν αὐτοῖς, τὸ τίς αὐτῶν δοκεῖ εἶναι μείζων. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν κυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν, καὶ οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες αὐτῶν εὐεργέται καλοῦνται. ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως.—S. Luke xxii. 24, 25.

THE subject of this lecture is "Roman Claims to Supremacy," and its purpose is to give a brief historical sketch of the earliest history of these claims, and of the early Church's attitude toward the Roman See. At the close I shall hope to suggest a few thoughts on the practical question, how we ought to regard these claims, and what ought to be our own attitude toward the Roman See.

The historical question does not necessarily solve the practical one. For the Church's attitude toward the Roman See has varied in different countries and at different times, and it is a conceivable position that, granting that the attitude of the modern Roman Catholic toward the pope may be something unknown to the mind of the earlier Church, yet it may be the right attitude now. This is, I say, a conceivable position, and it or something like it is taken up by some under the supposed warrant of the scientific conception of development.

Let me say a word about this conception. The idea of development, that is of the slow and often hardly perceptible growth to which the phenomena of history owe their existence, is one of the distinctive features of modern historical method. And it has been, as you know, applied by Cardinal Newman, in what may be called his most eloquent and characteristic book, to justify the papal claim, as well as every other important characteristic of Roman Catholicism, as the genuine and exclusive expression and embodiment, in our time, of apostolic Christianity. I am not going to wander into a general examination of Cardinal Newman's argument; I am only concerned to point out that development in his hands is a very different conception from development as the characteristic conception of modern biology or history. The latter is concerned solely with the *explanation*, the former solely with the *legitimacy*, of the process. The biologist or the historian<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The theory of development as formulated and applied by Newman . . . was logical and abstract, not biological or historical and real; . . . its end was a mere fraction or section of the collective organism isolated from all the rest, and invested with functions whose origin evolution could well have explained, but was not allowed to touch."  
—Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 34.

pursues a wild quarry, and follows wherever the chase leads him; the apologist for Rome works toward a foregone conclusion, and is content if, by applying a variety of tests, he can show that his result was reached by a continuous process, and that the progressive changes have gone on with no sudden break of corporate identity.

The true historical conception of development brings with it two sister-ideas, which the apologetic method as applied by Newman leaves out of account. There is, first, the conception of relativity, which requires us to understand what each institution, or idea, or formula, meant to the age in which it was current or established—by virtue of which we ask, primarily, not whether men were right or wrong in their actions or beliefs, but *how they came* to think and act as they did, and how in turn their thought and life influenced those of later times. We may regard the Medieval Papacy, or the papal claims in their earlier form as expressed by Leo the Great, as the inevitable outcome of their time, as part of the divinely ordered course of human history, and as in their turn rendering inevitable the modern papal claims. We may recognize that the latter are not without justification

from the point of view of those who make them, but we are obliged to allow the same to be true of quite opposite claims and systems ; and the law of historical development, conditioned by historical relativity, applies to all alike, and not to the papal system only.

Again, there is the comparative method, or induction as applied to the study of life in all its forms, without which the modern conception of historical method is wholly incomplete. In tracing the development of religion, even of the Christian religion, we find many phenomena that are capable of more explanations than one, according as we take in a wide or a limited horizon of religious and social history. Without this method, we cannot tell what features of historical Christianity are really unique and distinctive ; what it has borrowed from without, or what it has developed merely as secondary products, in virtue not of itself, but of the conditions through which it has passed.

The scientific idea of development, with its conception of relativity and its comparative method, enables us to ascertain facts, to see them in their order of cause and effect and in their true historical perspective. It helps us to understand heretic and orthodox, Pope and

Protestant alike, and to see why both were inevitable. That all alike have developed does not indeed prove that all are equally right. But that any given form has developed is in itself no proof of its exclusive legitimacy. And it is the search for a proof of this latter kind that distinguishes development as an *apologetic method*, involving the idea of "an infallible developing authority," from development as the characteristic conception of modern *scientific* method. Both are called by the same name, both alike recognize slow continuous growth; but there practically all likeness ends.

Unquestionably, then, in the modern Papacy we have a product of development. And in great part our own attitude toward the Papacy must be governed by considerations independent of this fact; by the religious instincts formed in us by the Gospels and Epistles, by the estimate we form of the general influence of Rome upon human life and civilization, of her adequacy to deal with the varied and pressing problems of the present time. Of these things I do not speak to-day; but a sketch of the actual course which the earliest development of the Papacy ran has certainly some practical interest for us. We can estimate what causes contributed to it,



and what causes did not; we can judge whether the first impetus toward a Papacy came wholly from within the Church, or partly from without; whether the whole Christian instinct or tradition contributed to its growth, or whether the Papacy as it grew lost sight of, and cut itself adrift from, real factors in the life of the Church, which have revenged themselves in later times in the form of protest, schism, or reform.

I propose, after a very brief glance at the evidence of the New Testament, to sketch the growth of the Papacy in three main periods: firstly, the second century down to Irenaeus, when the importance of the Roman Church is seen gradually elevating that of its bishop; secondly, the period from Victor to Julius I, embracing the third century and part of the fourth; thirdly, the period of Julius I. and his successors in the fourth century, in whom we may fairly claim to find the first "popes" in any real sense of the word.

## I.

In the New Testament, we consider first the Gospels, then the apostolic literature. Three texts in the Gospels have played an important part in the development of papal

claims. Of these, that at the end of S. John<sup>1</sup> depends for its applicability upon previous conclusions deduced from the other two. Of these two again, that in S. Luke<sup>2</sup> may be excluded from our consideration on the ground that its application to papal claims is a very late after-thought. I know of no such use of it earlier than a papal letter of the year 681. The third<sup>3</sup> and really important passage has been very commonly understood both in East and West as conferring some kind of primacy upon *S. Peter*. But the tradition of the Eastern Churches, at least down to 600 A.D., refuses to connect this text with the ascendancy of the See of Rome. I have neither met with any utterance to this effect, nor apparently can Roman Catholic apologists quote any<sup>4</sup>. The application of the text Matt. xvi. 18 to the Roman See is of purely Western origin, and we find it beginning to be made as soon as the belief has gained currency that S. Peter had been, in the strict sense of the word, Bishop of

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 15-17, "Feed my sheep."

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxii. 32, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," &c.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvi. 16 sqq. "Thou art Peter," &c.

<sup>4</sup> To verify this impression I have looked through *Allies' See of S. Peter*, *St. Peter, his Name and Office*, and *Hurter, Theol. Dogm. Tract iii.*

Rome. The second century, as I believe, bequeathed this belief to the Church, and the first attribution of the Petrine *office* to the Roman bishop was the work of the third. But only the course of Church history in the fourth century made possible the first claims of the Roman See to papal *power*.

Passing from the Gospels to the apostolic age, we distinguish the earlier or Hebraic<sup>1</sup> period, when the Church entirely centres in Jerusalem, from the later period when the Church has entered on her world-wide mission, and the Church of Jerusalem is, at first, but one among several sections of a cosmopolitan body, and then, after the destruction of Jerusalem, one of the least important. The earlier period, then, centres round the person of S. Peter, and in the infant Church of Jerusalem he takes the unquestioned lead. In the later period, the central figure is that of S. Paul, and S. Peter plays a far less important part. The Church now divides itself into two sections<sup>2</sup>. The Apostle of the Uncircumcision, of the body in which we already see the Church of the future, is S. Paul. In all the great centres of the empire—Antioch, Asia Minor, Corinth, and in

<sup>1</sup> Acts i—xii.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. ii. 7.

Rome itself—he finds his proper sphere, unclaimed by any previous apostolic worker<sup>1</sup>. S. Peter is the Apostle of the Circumcision, yet mainly as it would seem<sup>2</sup> of the Jewish body throughout the world rather than of the local body of Jerusalem. The headship here has passed into the hands of James, who speaks the decisive word<sup>3</sup> at the Apostolic Council, and in whom the Judaising tradition of the succeeding century sees the one central authority<sup>4</sup> of the Apostolic Church<sup>5</sup>. Outside Jerusalem then, in the later apostolic age, there is a dual leadership; and in every Church where Jewish and Gentile Christians were imperfectly fused—and their perfect fusion belongs to the sub-apostolic age, and in some places to a later date still—there not Peter alone nor Paul alone, but Peter and Paul together, were the twin heads and princes of the apostolic brotherhood. If, as I think

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xv. 20, i. 13, &c.

<sup>2</sup> In spite of some difficulties in the body of the epistle, this seems involved in 1 Peter i. 1, ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς: cf. ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ, James i. 1.

<sup>3</sup> διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω, xv. 19.

<sup>4</sup> James in the Clementines is "Bishop of bishops," commands Peter to report to him annually his sayings and doings, &c. (*Recogn.* I. xvii).

<sup>5</sup> On the whole subject, see Lightfoot, *S. Clement*, ii. 490, and preceding pages.

the earliest ascertainable tradition witnesses, SS. Peter and Paul suffered a conjoint martyrdom at Rome<sup>1</sup>, S. Peter's presence there is naturally coupled with the fact that the earliest Roman Church was largely though not preponderantly Jewish<sup>2</sup>, and that there was work for both apostles there without any violation of their mutually recognized spheres.

These are the simple facts of the New Testament concerning S. Peter; he takes the lead in the original community of Jerusalem, and afterwards in the Jewish section of Christendom outside Palestine. But of any *authority* exercised by him over the other apostles, or within the Gentile Churches entrusted to the apostolic headship of S. Paul, there is no trace. The New Testament then does not give us the slightest hint that the Apostolic Church bequeathed a Papacy to the succeeding age; not a hint that the words "Thou art Peter" had fixed the constitution of the Church of Christ as a monarchy under a visible head.

<sup>1</sup> Clem. *Ad Cor.* v. 4; Dionys. *Cor.* in Eus. *H. E.* II. xxv, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Discussed most recently in Sanday and Headlam's *Romans*, pp. xxvi—xxxiv.

## II.

We now examine our first period of Church history, in which, as I said, we find the importance of the Roman Church gradually elevating that of its bishop. The evidence we have is not ample, but is sufficient to decide between two opposite views. According to the Roman view, "the Roman Church has always had the preeminence" for one supreme reason : because *her bishop was from the first* the acknowledged heir to the divinely constituted monarchy, founded in the person of Peter her first bishop. According to the view which, in common with the best modern scholars<sup>1</sup>, I hold to be true, the Roman Church inevitably, even had S. Peter never been there, enjoyed a marked preeminence from the first; and the first impetus toward a Papacy in the Church came from this fact, a fact which followed from the position of Rome in the world. Only quite at the end of the second century do we find the Roman *bishop* exercising the primacy hitherto vested in his Church as a body. The power of the earlier Roman bishops was built upon that of their

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lightfoot, *S. Clement*, vol. I, pp. 70 sq. Salmon, *Introd. to N. T.* p. 565 n.

Church, and not *vice versa*. The power of the Roman Church was in truth part of a wide-reaching phenomenon. Rome was not a mere capital, but a sovereign city, queen of the world. She stood to the empire not as London to England or Paris to France, but rather as England to India, or the home government to our crown colonies. A Roman citizen constitutionally regarded the provincials as his subjects. Now the Roman Church did not originally consist of Roman citizens, but was strongest in the Greek-speaking lower strata of the population. Still, from almost the very first, the Gospel made conquests among the Romans proper, even among the noble and princely families of the city. Modern research has made this clearer than ever<sup>1</sup>; and the Latin-speaking citizen-caste necessarily brought with it into the Church something of the spirit of empire. What Rome was to the provinces, Rome's Church was to the Churches; and this by virtue of a cause which we trace elsewhere. The Christian Churches spread slowly but surely over the Roman world, a loosely-federated fluid mass. With time, this mass gained in solidity and cohesion, and at last,

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, *ib.* pp. 30 sqq.; Caspari, *Quellen*, iii. pp. 281 n., sq.

before the age of Constantine, it had assumed a nearly fixed and permanent contour. That contour is that of the surface over which it originally flowed. Its internal structure certainly is its own. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons we find everywhere alike. But bishops have become in practice subordinated to bishops; the bishops of a civil province form a recognized organic group under the primacy of the bishop of the capital<sup>1</sup>; even the Bishop of Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> is the suffragan of Caesarea, the capital of Palestine; the Bishops of Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, and many lesser capitals are supreme in their respective provinces, and the primacy of all is inevitably found to be at Rome. This process of consolidation was actively going on in the second century, and the causes which in that century brought the episcopal system into uniform action everywhere, were gradually transforming the natural primacy of a Church into the inevitable primacy of its bishop. Every scrap of evidence that belongs to our

<sup>1</sup> In some few provinces the *senior* bishop (*episcopus primas sedis*) presides, whatever his see; e.g. Palmas in Pontus (Euseb. *H. E.* V. xxiii.); so in Numidia and in Spain (Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, i, p. 355 n).

<sup>2</sup> But he enjoyed from very early times a certain peculiar prestige; see Sohms, i, p. 353 n.



period, viz. previous to A.D. 190, harmonizes naturally with the above account.

First, we have the famous epistle of the Church of Rome to that of Corinth, written about 95 A.D., and associated by trustworthy tradition with the name of Clement, the then head of the Roman Church. It is well known that in the parts of this letter which have been brought to light in our own day, the Roman Church adopts here and there a sharply imperative tone<sup>1</sup>, claiming obedience, sending representatives, and assuring the Corinthians that the peace of their Church has been and is the deep concern of the Church of Rome.

But two things strike us: firstly, of course, the total silence as to any right of the Roman bishop to speak as the successor of Peter; secondly, and more important, that the letter is throughout wholly impersonal. The writer's name, personality, and office are suppressed, the letter is in the name of the Roman *Church*, and might be the work of a secretary<sup>2</sup> in no

<sup>1</sup> lxiii. 2-4, &c.

<sup>2</sup> To communicate with foreign Churches was of course a prominent duty of a bishop at Rome, however merged he might still be in the presbyteral body. Cf. Herm. Vis. II. iv. 3 ἐκείνῳ γὰρ (i. e. Clement) ἐπιστέλλανται.

position of personal authority. Authority there is, but it is in no sense papal or even episcopal authority.

It was not in fact, unless all the evidence is singularly misleading, till after this date that the Roman bishop came to stand out among his fellow-presbyters to the extent traceable—in the case of Asia Minor—in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Clement's letter describes the Christian hierarchy, instituted by the apostles and modelled upon the Jewish. But here, as in the New Testament<sup>1</sup>, the ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος are one and the same; the writer sets against the priestly rank of Aaron not a pope, not even a bishop, but the presbyter-bishops to whom the apostles have transmitted their mission by continuous succession. That the Church of Rome was originally, and continued till the time of Victor, *presbyterian* in the technical sense, is of course an exaggeration. Her well-attested list of bishops, preserved from the earliest times, refutes this idea. But its exaggeration should not blind us to the possibility that the *monarchical power* of the bishop in his own Church was of slower growth at Rome than elsewhere. The re-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 17 and 28, &c.

ference of Hermas (circa 141) to Clement merely as charged with the correspondence of the Church<sup>1</sup>; his reference to the *πρεσβύτεροι οἱ τῆς ἐκκλησίας προϊστάμενοι*; the similar reference of Irenaeus to Victor's predecessors as *πρεσβύτεροι*; the fact that Soter (c. 170) still writes to the Church of Corinth simply in the name of his Church, and that the same form apparently survives even under Victor: all this points to the conclusion I have stated, and we shall see from Irenaeus that the bearing of these facts upon the wider question is in exact harmony with what we have gathered from the letter of Clement.

The second century, the age of the first great persecutions, and the age of the apologists, was also the first period of severe internal tension in the Churches. The fight with Gnosticism, the strange Montanist movement, the Easter question, the Monarchian controversies, all bore upon the tendency we are tracing, and all in one special way. In presence of these difficulties the Churches are closing their ranks, and organizing their mutual relations. Everywhere the bishop more

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, *S. Clement*, i, pp. 71 sq., 353.

and more represents his Church in all external relations, and his fellow-presbyters sink to a position of marked subordination<sup>1</sup>.

I now pass to a subject which will afford a clinching test of the point to which our inquiry has brought us, namely, whether the Roman Church owed her primacy to her bishop, or the Roman bishop to his Church. I refer to the famous passage of Irenaeus<sup>2</sup>; handed down to us, alas, only in a Latin translation.

Irenaeus is confuting the Gnostics, whose appeal was to tradition alleged to have been orally and privately handed down from the apostles. Against this allegation Irenaeus appeals to the public official tradition of the Churches, especially Churches founded by apostles—a public tradition whose continuity is vouched for by the unbroken succession of bishops in each case. But to save the time involved in giving the succession in all the Churches, he cites Rome, Smyrna, and Ephesus only, and especially the most great and ancient Church of Rome founded by SS. Peter and Paul:

<sup>1</sup> Sohm, §§ 15-17; Gore, *The Church and the Ministry*, pp. 320-336.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. iii. 3.

"*Maxima et antiquissima a gloriosis duobus apostolis Petro et Paulo Romae fundata et constituta.*"

"*Ad hanc enim ecclesiam propter potiore principatatem necesse est omnem convenire ecclesiam, hoc est eos qui sunt undique fideles, in qua semper ab his qui sunt undique conservata est ea quæ est ab apostolis traditio.*"

For to this Church, on account of its superior pre-eminence, it is necessary that every Church, that is the faithful from every quarter, should resort, in which (Church) the tradition derived from the Apostles has, by those who are (there) from every quarter, been preserved.

To appeal to *all* Churches, as he says, would be endless; but it is also needless, for this particular Church is the compendium of all, and gathers up in her cosmopolitan body the convergent tradition of the Catholic world.

Notice that Irenæus is specifying his reasons for taking the Roman Church as representative, and that in doing so he totally omits what to any modern Roman Catholic would be the all-important and only-sufficient reason for doing so, viz. the unique authority of the Roman bishop as heir of S. Peter's privileges. On the contrary, the direct reason is the "necessity" that the "faithful from all parts" should "betake themselves" (*convenire*) to the Roman Church. *Conve-*

*nire ad* means, as abundant parallels show, not "to agree with" but "to resort" to<sup>1</sup>. This concourse of the faithful from all parts to the Roman Church, a phenomenon which the second century illustrates in the person of Ignatius, Justin, Polycarp, Hegesippus, Abercius, Irenaeus himself, and a host of others, orthodox and unorthodox, is in its turn explained by the *potior principalitas*, the superior preeminence of the Roman Church; a preeminence which it enjoyed, as I have shown, quite antecedent to any supposed prerogative inherent in its bishop. Why then, we ask Irenaeus, does this concourse of Christians from elsewhere recommend Rome for selection as the type of apostolic doctrine? What specially guarantees the preservation *there* of apostolic doctrine? Irenaeus answers this crucial question in express terms: It is

<sup>1</sup> Facciolati s. v.; cf. also "nullum non hominum genus concurrat in Urbem" (Sen. *Consol. ad. Helv.* vi); "Ῥώμην ... ἐκτρομὴν τῆς οἰκουμένης" (Athenaeus i. 36); "In illo Orbis Terrarum Conciliabulo" (P. Ann. Flori *fragm.* p. 41, ed. Jahn); "Civitas ex conventu nationum constituta" (Cic. *De Pet. Cons.* xiv. 54). See Caspari, *Ungedr. Quellen*, iii. 276 note. Also Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 97. For the sense of "convenire ad" in the Latin Bible, see Puller *The Primitive Saints and the See of Rome*, p. 33.

the flow of Christians from<sup>1</sup> all parts—*ei qui sunt undique fideles*—they are the guarantee. Of any guarantee inherent in the Roman bishop as distinct from other bishops, Irenaeus says nothing and knows nothing. He looks for it at the opposite end of the scale. Ask a modern cardinal why the tradition of Rome is authoritative, and his answer will be brief and frank: The Pope. Ask Irenaeus, and in his elaborately full answer there is no pope at all, but instead of it an appeal to the faithful from all quarters: *hi qui sunt undique*. The contrast is complete and impressive—Irenaeus has grasped a grandly simple and convincing principle. The concordant testimony of many widely scattered and wholly independent Churches on the broad outlines of Christian belief was unaccountable except by tracing all alike to a common origin—the body of apostolic teaching: "Whether it were they or I, so we preach, and so ye believed." This same focussing in one of

<sup>1</sup> It has been attempted to evade this by rendering "undique" as if it were "ubique," and "in qua" by "in communion with which"; the support the latter rendering derives from the "in qua" of Optatus ii. 2 is not strong, in face of the context here (see previous note).

many lines of independent testimony gave its irresistible weight to the Church's repudiation of Arianism at Nicaea; and to Irenaeus the Roman Church was the *conventus* of Christendom, its testimony that of a kind of informal permanent General Council<sup>1</sup>.

The modern Roman appeal to the unanimity of her bishops and priests throughout the world has a hollow ring. All are unanimous, because all are but the echoes of a central imperative voice. The modern dogmas of 1854 and 1870 have been imposed from headquarters, not handed down by independent lines of transmission. The pyramid now rests on its point, not upon its base; the appeal of Irenaeus to the "*hi qui sunt undique*," the "*quod ubique*" of a later churchman of Gaul, have lost their meaning.

Irenaeus then shows us the Roman Church in much the same light as does the Epistle of Clement; only in a form which bears the traces of the problems and experiences of the generations which separate the two writers. The history of Victor, the younger contemporary of Irenaeus, illustrates the way in which, within the Roman Church, the bishop

<sup>1</sup> See p. 219, note. Christian Rome was becoming to the church what Pagan Rome was to the world.



had risen to monarchical power. And the composition of this Church was increasingly Roman and Latin<sup>1</sup>: it had grown and was growing in influence, in wealth, in munificence<sup>2</sup> to other Churches, and in representative character. All was ripe for a further advance.

And it may be established hereafter that the second century, which began with the true Clement, ended with the false. Certainly it is about the end of this century that the pseudo-Clementine view of the early history of the Roman Church begins to be traceable in ecclesiastical literature. And it is hardly less clear that about the same time the Roman Church began to subordinate the tradition of Peter and Paul, her joint "founders," and of Linus her first bishop, to the Clementine tale of Peter's victory over Simon at Rome, of his twenty-five years' episcopate there<sup>3</sup>, and of his ordination of Clement as his first successor.

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. *H. E.* v. 21: ὥστε ἤδη καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ Ρωμῆς εὐμάλα πλούτῳ καὶ γένει διαφανῶν ἐπὶ τὴν σφῶν ὁμοσε χωρεῖν πανοικί τε καὶ πανγένει σωτηρίαν. Also Orig. *C. Cels.* III. ix. Hipp. *Philos.* ix. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Eus. *H. E.* IV. xxiii. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Lightfoot, *S. Clement*, i. 340, 2. 501; Salmon, *Infallibility*, p. 355.

Down to this date, we have heard only of Peter and Paul together, of their "consolidating" the Roman Church by their martyrdom, of their pouring into her their doctrine with their blood<sup>1</sup>. Henceforth we begin to hear less of Paul and more of Peter; of Peter as the first in the line of Roman bishops, and of the Roman bishop as the "Vicar" or representative of Peter.

### III.

At the beginning of our second period, then, which extends from the last decade of the second century to the middle of the fourth, we find the Roman bishop the monarchical head of the first Church in Christendom<sup>2</sup>. And in the episcopate of Victor (189-199) we find a conspicuous landmark in the history of our question. The Churches of Asia Minor had from the apostles' time kept their Easter on the 14th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it fell. The rest of the Christian world, with scarcely an exception, kept it always on the succeeding Sunday.

<sup>1</sup> Tertull. *De Praescr.* 36.

<sup>2</sup> Illustrated by Tertullian's scoffing reference to Callistus as "pontifex maximus . . . episcopus episcoporum" (*De Pudic.* i).

In the last decade of the second century councils were held on this subject in Palestine, Pontus, Osroene, Asia Minor, Italy, and Gaul<sup>1</sup>; and all except Asia Minor were unanimous in supporting the ordinary practice. A letter of the Italian council, which bore the name of Victor, was extant in the time of Eusebius<sup>2</sup>, and appears to have been addressed, in somewhat imperious terms, to the dissentient bishops of Asia. It drew forth a dignified but uncompromising reply from the venerable Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus. Thereupon<sup>3</sup> Victor "wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate. But this did not please all the bishops, and they besought him to consider the things of peace and of neighbourly unity and love. Words of theirs are extant sharply rebuking Victor." Among them, Eusebius quotes the

<sup>1</sup> The first "councils" of which we hear were those of Asia Minor and Greece (c. 170) against the Montanists; the long peace of the Church under Commodus had made such meetings easier. The councils in the text seem to have been held at Victor's instance. Eus. *H. E.* V. xxiv. 8, ὑμεῖς ἡγούμενα.

<sup>2</sup> *H. E.* V. xxiii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Eus. says (1) that he *attempted* to cut them off from the common unity, (2) that he *did* cut them off from *his own* communion. The two statements are perfectly compatible.

rebuke of Irenaeus, who contrasts with the petulant intolerance<sup>1</sup> of Victor the fraternal charity of his predecessor Anicetus, who after failing to convince Polycarp on this question when the latter visited Rome, simply allowed him to preside at the Eucharist in his own place as a token of respect. But the difference of character shown is not merely personal; it marks an advance from the impersonal preeminence of a Church toward the personal ascendancy of a bishop. From this time forward it begins to be important to distinguish between the claims made by Roman bishops, and the position accorded to them by other Churches.

Have we then any record of Victor's own estimate of his position? An able attempt has been made by Harnack<sup>2</sup>—and some Roman Catholic writers have eagerly pounced upon his discovery—to claim for Victor<sup>3</sup> the authorship of a tract against gambling which is printed among the spurious works of S. Cyprian. In this tract the words occur:

<sup>1</sup> Irenaeus has the excellent remark that "the difference of the fast only brings out the agreement in the faith."

<sup>2</sup> *Texte und Unters.* vol. V, part I.

<sup>3</sup> It had been maintained by Pamelius and Bellarmine that the author must be a Roman bishop.

"Quoniam in nobis divina et paterna pietas apostolatus ducatum contulit et vicariam Domini sedem caelesti dignatione ordinavit, et originem authenticum apostolatus, super quem Christus fundavit ecclesiam, in superiore nostro portamus," etc.

Since upon us the loving-kindness of our God and Father has conferred apostolic primacy, and by heavenly favour settled a chair representative of the Lord, and since we in our predecessor bear the source of (that) authentic apostleship upon which Christ founded the Church, . . . &c. &c.

Here, then, it is thought, we have a Roman bishop claiming an apostolic primacy and successorship of Peter—the earliest example on record. But to begin with, the authorship of Victor is not strictly proved, and Harnack's result has found only partial acceptance<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, the writer further on speaks of *St. Paul* as *Vicarius Christi*, which phrase is therefore not used in its later and papal sense; and the tenour of the tract suggests that the episcopal office, *as such*, not any status peculiar to a *Roman* bishop, is in view throughout. Lastly, had the papal character of the language been apparent to ancient scholars, they would not have thought of Cyprian as its probable author. *Either*

<sup>1</sup> Dr. F. X. Funk, one of the most sober Roman Catholic critics, is not convinced.

then we have Victor describing himself in language which was then thought applicable to any bishop, or, which is perhaps more likely, we have an unknown, probably African, bishop magnifying his office in a way natural to a fellow-countryman of Cyprian.

In reviewing the third century as a link in the development of the Papacy, I shall pass very briefly over the storm which in the early years of the century convulsed the Roman Church, although without leaving any traces of disturbing influence on the Church at large. That Hippolytus, the most learned and influential Roman churchman of the time, regarded two successive Roman bishops as heretical, and was possibly consecrated as the rival of one of them<sup>1</sup>; and that to the Church at large this was a mere local dispute which attracted no attention elsewhere, are facts easy to explain if the Roman bishop was still far from having reached the position of a pope, but hardly intelligible<sup>2</sup> if he was to Rome and to Christendom what he

<sup>1</sup> This was the view of Döllinger (*Hipp. und Callistus*), and is maintained by Neumann, *Der röm. Staat u. d. Christl. Kirche*, pp. 257 sqq. Lightfoot, *St. Clem.* vol. II, pp. 317-477, holds that he was Bishop of Portus.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Salmon, *Infallibility*, pp. 386, 394.

now claims to be. Accordingly the facts, brought to light in quite recent years, have been questioned; but critical scholarship is unanimous in recognizing the evidence as authentic.

The third century is remarkable for a change in the character and method of the persecutions, namely, their special concentration against the bishops and clergy. This is expressly recorded of Maximinus Thrax<sup>1</sup> (235); and Decius, in the most systematic and thoroughgoing persecution yet instituted, was *infestus sacerdotibus*<sup>2</sup>, specially hostile to the bishops. The civil power has begun to be impressed with the powerful organization of the Christian body, and with the necessity of striking at the body through its leaders. "He would have rather heard of the rise of a rival emperor than of the election of a priest of God (i.e. a bishop) at Rome." And in fact this century is the age in which the organization of the Churches into one body, by means of the council and the metropolitan system, made its most important advances toward a final form.

<sup>1</sup> Eus. H. E. vi. 28 τοὺς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ἀρχοντας ἀναρεῖσθαι προστάττει.

<sup>2</sup> Cypr. Ep. lv. 9.

In theory (as formulated by Cyprian), every bishop as such was equal, while yet no bishop was independent. Each bishop was in some sense a bishop of the whole Church, and had his share in a joint responsibility for the well-being of the Church as a whole<sup>1</sup>. The episcopate is one, and is lodged entire in the hands of each bishop. Its unity, moreover, symbolized in the original commission to S. Peter, was centred in the See of S. Peter at Rome. This is in brief the position of the Roman See in Cyprian's theory of the Church. If understood in the sense that the Roman bishop could compel conformity to his commands on pain of separation from the Church, we are already far on the road toward the Papacy. And certainly Cyprian's view of the Roman See contributed something to the later theory of papal power. But Cyprian did not understand it so himself. The crucial test of a breach of communion with Rome came to be applied in his lifetime, and Cyprian calmly appeals to the judgement of Christ as the only judge "*qui unus et solus habet potestatem . . . de actu nostro iudicandi*"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* lv. 24, *De Unit.* iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Opp.* i. 436. Cf. Langen, *Gesch. d. röm. Kirche*, i. 332 n.



The function of the Roman See in relation to unity was, to Cyprian, ideal and typical; it carried with it no jurisdiction, no right to dictate. Cyprian's letters to Roman bishops are perfectly independent, though profoundly affectionate in tone; and when, rightly or wrongly, he differed from a Roman bishop on a grave question, he would not yield his own conviction. And, echoing Cyprian's firm protest, the Eastern bishop Firmilian observes that in attempting to excommunicate the brethren, the Roman bishop is only excommunicating himself. Stephen of Rome was doubtless right on the question of baptism, and Cyprian and Firmilian wrong; but had the latter regarded Stephen as their divinely constituted head, they would neither have acted nor spoken as they did.

Cyprian's practice was consistent with his theory. And the entire absence of any idea on his part that the supreme right of government was vested in the Roman See, may be seen in his attitude in the matter of appeals. Ecclesiastical appeals were inconsistent with his ideal theory, but were becoming practically inevitable. He speaks sternly of those who "dare to cross the sea" even to the

central see of Christendom, and contends that ecclesiastical causes should be settled where the circumstances of the case are known. But in practice justice sometimes miscarries where local prejudice and party feeling runs high; and in the third century we have the beginnings of a system of appeals. Men who are not satisfied with a verdict will naturally try and obtain another; and it was this tendency that led two Spanish bishops, Martial and Basilides, deposed for their conduct in the Decian persecution, to go to Rome for redress. They got what they wished, and Stephen declared them innocent and unlawfully deposed. But the Spanish Churches carried the case on to Cyprian, who, in a council held in 254, set aside the judgement of Stephen<sup>1</sup>, and affirmed the justice of the depositions and the regularity of the consecration of new bishops in the room of the appellants. This case not only completely disproves the existence of any Papacy in Cyprian's time, but as has been justly remarked, "illustrates the natural, non-

<sup>1</sup> Ep. 67. Sohm seems to have no ground for assuming that most of the Spanish bishops preferred Stephen's verdict to that of Cyprian. He treats Cyprian's "*aliqui*" (§. 9) as though it were "*plerique*."

theological manner in which the system of appeals grew up<sup>1</sup>."

A less formal case of appeal is that of the case between Dionysius the Great, Bishop of Alexandria, and his namesake of Rome (259-268). The Bishop of Alexandria had by this time come to exercise powers of supervision over all the Churches of Northern Africa as far as Cyrene and Ptolemais. Dionysius, a pupil of Origen, had been active in combating the Sabellian teaching which had taken root widely in the latter region. But in his treatment of the difficult questions involved he had laid himself open to misunderstanding, and certain orthodox brethren, without consulting the Bishop of Alexandria, went to Rome and informally (as it would seem) spoke against him in the presence of the Roman bishop. The latter, either in his own name or in that of a synod<sup>2</sup>, wrote to his namesake on the subject, and the Bishop of Alexandria replied with an elaborate refutation and defence. There the matter dropped.

We have to notice, firstly, that the opponents of Dionysius take no formal proceedings against him. For the latter purpose a

<sup>1</sup> Gore, *Roman Catholic Claims*, p. 114 n.

<sup>2</sup> Athanas. *De Syn.* 45.

council of local bishops, such as not long afterwards met to depose Paul of Samosata from the See of Antioch, would have been the regular tribunal. They go to Rome, and "speak against"<sup>1</sup> the Bishop of Alexandria. Evidently they doubt of their success, if the question is stirred in Egypt or the East, and they go to Rome, the only see which overtopped the prestige of Alexandria. Next, the proceedings of the Roman bishop are not those of a trial of an appeal, but rather of one co-trustee inquiring of another as to his administration of a common trust, the deposit of faith. And lastly, the Bishop of Alexandria betrays by no syllable any consciousness of dependence or subjection<sup>2</sup>. Rome claims no jurisdiction, nor does Alexandria admit any. This is true of the documents which remain. If they were more complete it would be interesting to compare the tone of Dionysius of Rome with that of his predecessor Stephen, and of his successors, of whom we shall speak presently. But this we cannot do. Only we shall find that the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *κατέλιπον* Athan. *Apol. c. Ar.* 18 *init.* "reported to the prejudice of."

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius merely says that, had Dionysius been guilty of heresy, he could have been deposed by "other bishops."

case of Dionysius was treasured up at Rome as a precedent for some undefined right of Rome to interfere with the See of Alexandria in particular. The Roman See, which never was disturbed by a precedent adverse to her claims, never forgot one which favoured them. Every intervention of this kind went to the accumulating weight which in time was to attract all the important affairs of the Churches, at least in the West, to Rome as their centre.

As we approach the end of the third century and the age of Constantine, we see that a great deal of potential energy, so to speak, has already accumulated in the See of Rome. The ideal of Church government embodied by Cyprian's theory of Church government—of a single episcopate co-extensive with the Church, and vested equally in every bishop—was everywhere and inevitably breaking down. The ideal was making way for the practical; the spiritual conception of the bishop was becoming modified by the official; the Church was becoming organized, and organization meant the subordination of bishops to bishops, the elaboration of a constitutional law for the Church as a whole. The mutual jealousies of bishops noted by Euse-

b<sup>1</sup> at this period, "assailing each other with words like spears"—the rivalries which he refuses to describe in detail<sup>2</sup>—were the inevitable accompaniment of such a period of settlement. The complete extension of the subordination of bishops to bishops—of the metropolitan system—over the whole Church, belongs to the age after Nicaea<sup>3</sup>; but already we are within sight of its completion. And already the one natural centre for the interchange of communications between the churches—already the one see whose communion it is most important to retain—already the supreme moral influence, is Rome; and what is still lacking of a Papacy is the transformation of a moral influence into a legal right—and this came in time.

But before it came, the tendency required

<sup>1</sup> *H. E.* VIII. i. 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* ii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> It was not accomplished without protest. The resolution of the Council of Ephesus, sometimes called its 8th canon, forbids any bishop to subject to his see any province not from the first subject to it, "lest the arrogance of secular power creep in under cover of the priestly office, and we thus lose by degrees that liberty which our Lord Jesus Christ bestowed upon us by His own blood." This was in 431, a few years after the close of the case of Apiarius mentioned below, p. 248. Cf. Bright, *Notes on the Canons*, in loc.

reinforcement: and the conversion of Constantine reinforced it in many ways.

The analogy between the civil organization of the empire and the organization of the Church did not at first and directly suggest a spiritual emperor for the latter, who should legislate for the Church in the form of rescripts and edicts, and whose provincial prefects and governors were the bishops. Such an idea was too foreign to the original conception of the episcopate to be thought of at first, though before the fourth century is out we begin to trace its unconscious influence in the growth first of appeals, then in the system of decretals<sup>1</sup>. But the Christian emperor was inevitably called upon to intervene in Church affairs, and the convenience to him of the existence of some central standard of reference in Church matters need hardly be pointed out. Aurelian, a generation before, had made short work of the contention for the Church property at Antioch by adjudging it to the bishop recognized by those of Italy and Rome. And Constantine deals with

<sup>1</sup> On the influence of the Roman law upon the discipline and organization of the Church, cf. some good remarks in Rashdall, *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, i. 135.

the Donatist trouble in a somewhat similar way. That more use was not made by the Emperor of the Roman See as a tribunal for Church affairs is due to nothing but the limited and informal nature of the powers which so far were lodged there in the eyes of the Church at large.

This is curiously illustrated by the case of the Donatist schism just alluded to. The Church of Africa was convulsed by a bitter controversy arising out of the question of the lapsed, and the matter was brought to Constantine. He referred it to a small council of nineteen bishops, with Melchiades, Bishop of Rome, at their head<sup>1</sup>. As however the Donatists demurred to the decision of so small a body, Constantine summoned a larger and more representative council at Arles (August, 314), which affirmed the Roman decision. The point which demands attention is that the See of Rome is clearly not the final authority here. Bishop Melchiades does his best, and with his colleagues gives a fair decision. But to furnish it with more decisive authority a large council is called; and so far as Melchiades can be said to have acted as a pope at

<sup>1</sup> *Eus. H. E. v. 18-20*; *Langen, i. 393*.



all, we have an appeal from a pope to a council. This latter point is one which comes out very clearly in S. Augustine's discussion of the case a century later: "If those who judged at Rome (i. e. Melchiades and the nineteen bishops) were wrong, there remained the appeal to a General Council of the Universal Church<sup>1</sup>."

We now pass to a greater controversy, the Arian. It is not unfair to remark that had anyone thought of the Roman bishop as the recognized arbiter in so great a cause, some recourse would have been had to his authority in the six stormy years before the great Council of Nicaea. The whole Church of Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria was unsettled by a storm of controversy which drew in partisans from the remotest parts of Christendom. Constantine tried every means to restore peace; the one means which no one thought of was the appeal to a papal arbitration. Had such an authority existed at the time, here was an occasion for its exercise—*dignus vindice nodus*. But the occasion was too great for the mere intervention of a bishop, even the Bishop of Rome; and Constantine had found at Arles that a council carried

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* 43. 19; cf. 105. 8.

more weight than any single bishop: the experiment of Arles was tried again on a grander scale.

At Nicaea, the business of the council was conducted by the emperor in person, and in part by Hosius, his right-hand man among the bishops, and the most personally respected<sup>1</sup> bishop present. The deputies of the Bishop of Rome were there, but did not preside. There is no evidence for the quite late assumption that Hosius was a representative of Rome, and none for any papal confirmation of the council. The formula adopted represented the Western rather than the Eastern theology; but in that fact we cannot directly trace the hand of Rome.

But the Canons of Nicaea are important for our purpose, marking as they do the transitional stage in the process we are following out. The council legislates on the relations of bishops to bishops; and while no Papacy is as yet there, the old theoretical equality of bishop to bishop is clearly doomed, if not already dead. The council accords to the bishop of the capital city in *every* civil province a right of veto on the appointment of any bishop in that province. This rule,

<sup>1</sup> Langen, i. 410 n; *Ath. Hist. Ar.* §. 42.

which is the germ of the metropolitan or archiepiscopal system, was already in force in many places<sup>1</sup>, but not in all. Its complete victory in the Church was the work of the fourth century. It was the deliberate and formal adoption of a principle which had already made its way in practice in many provinces—the assimilation of the ecclesiastical organization to the civil. But side by side with this rule the council adopted another. It found certain great sees in possession of an archiepiscopal jurisdiction over a wider area than a single province; and this state of things it simply confirmed. "Let the ancient customs prevail." This was firstly applicable to the See of Alexandria, whose jurisdiction over Libya and Egypt is ratified on the express ground that the See of Rome has a similar customary jurisdiction. This is also recognized in the case of Antioch. Jerusalem is also to have precedence, but only honorary, as the rights of the capital (Caesarea) are not to be impaired. Notice, first, that this is no dividing of the *whole* Church into what were later called Patriarchates. The great Churches enjoy a more extended jurisdiction than the ordinary capitals: Rome, e.g.

<sup>1</sup> Sohm, 366-8, 376.

over the seventeen<sup>1</sup> provinces of Italy, Alexandria over the (then) three provinces of Egypt, &c. ; and "the ancient customs" certainly had already secured to them within their respective areas, rights more extensive than the mere veto upon episcopal elections—rights to which the metropolitan power elsewhere only gradually extended. But the council knows of no subdivision of the whole Church into patriarchates, still less of any jurisdiction of one see over all. Secondly, the position of the See of Rome is *made the precedent* for the recognition of the rights of Alexandria, Antioch, and other capitals. If the Roman See were regarded as clothed with a unique and peculiar right of its own, its prerogative would have formed no basis whatever for the extension of the principle to other sees—no model for adoption elsewhere. *The fact that the jurisdiction of the Roman See, though extensive, was limited in area, alone made the Sixth Canon of*

<sup>1</sup> This appears to be the case, though some would exclude the provinces of Upper Italy, including Milan. The view in the text is that of Sohm, pp. 390, 408-60, who dates the 'metropolitan' rights of Milan from the middle of the fourth century. For the other view, cf. Bingham, IX. i. 9-11.

*Nicaea possible*<sup>1</sup>. The place of a primacy of jurisdiction over the entire Church is still vacant; though it is becoming clear that it will one day be occupied.

We pass from the Council of Nicaea into the confusion of the generation of controversy which followed. And in the twenty years after Nicaea which brings our second period to a close the controversy is, on the surface, a personal one. Doctrinal issues were of course at the bottom of it all; but the campaign was fought in the form of personal charges against individual leaders of the Nicene cause, and specially against Athanasius and Marcellus of Ancyra. After the death of Constantine, the East was in the hands of his son Constantius, who favoured the Arians; while the West was under Constans, the staunch friend of Athanasius. The position of Athanasius at Alexandria was evidently insecure; both parties in the East had tried to gain the support of Julius, Bishop of Rome, who wrote inviting all to a council. But in Lent 339 Athanasius was violently expelled in favour of an intrusive Arian bishop, and fled, like many other Eastern bishops, to Rome. Many months after his arrival, a long

<sup>1</sup> Sohm, p. 413.

and strongly worded letter from his accusers reached Julius, who kept it secret for a time, hoping against hope that the Orientals would come to the council. At last Julius convoked a synod of Italian bishops, investigated the charges against the Athanasians, found them baseless, and wrote a careful reply to the Eastern bishops. This letter, a masterpiece of statesmanlike logic and grave severity, has fortunately come down to us entire, and it is a landmark of the first importance in the history of papal claims. Julius is combating men who, as he tells us, claimed<sup>1</sup> "that all bishops have the same and equal authority," and are not to be ranked "according to the magnitude of their cities." Here is clearly a challenge, raising a question of right; here if at all the Bishop of Rome must state fully and frankly his claims to pronounce a judgment.

What then does Julius claim? He claims that proceedings against bishops should be according to the canon, and that the result should be announced "*to us all*, that so a just sentence might *proceed from all*." Universal reception is necessary to the validity of such

<sup>1</sup> Athanasius, p. 113 (in *Nicene and post-Nicene Library*, vol. IV).

proceedings; and without that of the Bishop of Rome, the recognition is not universal. Again, Julius claims to have the warrant of *custom* in demanding to be consulted in any case affecting the Church of Alexandria—an argument from precedent which I have already explained (p. 234). Lastly, he claims the possession of *traditions* derived from S. Peter: “what we have received from the blessed Apostle Peter, that I signify to you<sup>1</sup>.” But notice what he does *not* claim. He makes no claim to any *jurisdiction* derived from S. Peter, no claim to judge the case on his own authority. And when in need of a *final* authority, he has none to suggest. The Eastern bishops claim that a council has decided in their favour; Julius can only reply (not accurately) that the Canon of Nicaea rules that what one council has done another council can undo, a principle which may show the need of a final tribunal, but which shows no knowledge that any exists. This letter of Julius, our sole source of authentic information as to his claims<sup>2</sup>, is of vast importance. Its moral

<sup>1</sup> Athanasius, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Socrates and Sozomen, writing a century later, are merely summarising the letter of Julius which they found in the *Apology* of Athanasius.

dignity and cogent force enables us to understand the immense prestige of a Roman bishop at this time, while its formal claims, put forward under hostile challenge, justify us in regarding it as the high-water mark of the papal tendency down to 340. Most significant, then, is the contrast between the position taken up by Julius and that of his immediate successors who fill the remainder of the fourth century, Liberius (352-366), Damasus (366-384), and Siricius (384-398), the author of the first "Decretals."

In the letter of Julius, the authority of the Roman See is still purely and simply moral; but great moral authority is certainly there: the period we have been surveying (200-340) has stored in the Roman See a vast potential energy, and a very slight stimulus will suffice to liberate the latent force and transform it into active aggressive power. One such stimulus, and one which proved of great importance, came in the lifetime of Julius himself, namely, the Council of Sardica.



## IV.

Our third and last period, then, in the evolution of a Papacy, begins with the year 343, when Hosius, the Patriarch of Councils, proposed at Sardica a regular course of appeal to Julius in the case of aggrieved bishops. These canons<sup>1</sup> are limited to the case of deposed *bishops*. Julius is to consider whether a new trial is necessary. If not, the matter drops; if it appears to be called for, it is to be held by the bishops of the district where the case arose, and the Bishop of Rome is to have the option of sending representatives to assist in the new trial.

This canon, then, passed "to honour the memory of S. Peter," confers upon the Bishop of Rome a very limited appellate jurisdiction. He has no right to judge the case, no right to act at all unless appealed to, and then only to remit the case for reconsideration. Had the Roman See at that time had any appellate jurisdiction of its own, the Sardican Canon would have amounted to a restriction, not an enlargement, of its powers—and would hardly have

<sup>1</sup> Can. iii, vii.

been described as "honouring the memory of S. Peter." As it is, there is very little real difference between the positions taken up by Julius in the letter we have considered and that accorded by the council three years later. But there *is* this great distinction. Julius based his claims on custom and precedent, his authority is *moral* only. Sardica gives him a *legal* function—very limited no doubt in its nature, but world-wide in its area of exercise. In the Canon of Sardica, the successors of Julius found a convenient basis to build upon; after Sardica, men might say, in a sense in which they could never have said it before, "*habemus Papam*"<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time we must recollect that these canons did not pass into the working law of the Church<sup>2</sup>. Their importance lies rather in the encouragement they furnish to the Roman bishops to interfere on behalf of those who have recourse to their aid. Under the later popes of the 4th century this practice grew very frequent, and an occurrence of the years from 417 to 425 shows how

<sup>1</sup> The genuineness of the Sardican Canons is in my opinion indisputable.

<sup>2</sup> They are confirmed, but not recited *in extenso*, by the council in Trullo 340 years later: compare Salmon, *Infallibility*, p. 406.

it was defended against the charge of usurpation. A certain *presbyter* of Africa, Apiarius, was deposed by his bishop, and had recourse to Zosimus, Bishop of Rome; this proceeding, quite unwarranted by any law of the Church, led the African Church promptly to pass a canon excommunicating any clergy who should appeal to any foreign tribunal<sup>1</sup>. Bishop Zosimus replied with a threat of excommunication, backed by an appeal to the Canons "of Nicaea"—in reality those of Sardica, which moreover in no way countenanced such an appeal as that of Apiarius. The African bishops send their reply to Boniface, who had meanwhile succeeded Zosimus, to the effect that they will inquire of the great Oriental Sees what is the genuine text of the Nicene Canons. Six years later (425) they inform Pope Celestine, who is still maintaining the cause of Apiarius, that they have found by inquiry that the canons in question are not part of the acts of the Nicene Council, and request that they may not hear more of the matter. But, in 448, barely twenty years later, when Pope Leo I. wishes to assert his right to receive an appeal of Flavian of Constantinople against the pro-

<sup>1</sup> "Transmarina iudicia."

ceedings of the robber-synod of Ephesus, the Sardican Canons are again appealed to, and again as Nicene<sup>1</sup>!

This shows the tenacity with which so limited a right was asserted by Rome, and was invested with a sanction it did not really possess and with a force quite beyond its real scope. The Canons of Sardica were used, in fact, as the thin end of the wedge. But so thin an end would have been of but little use had not the tide been running strongly toward a Papacy. The model of organized government was there in the empire; a decision or law could be obtained from the emperors without difficulty on any disputed point—whereas in the Church bishops were deposing bishops, and councils clashing with councils; it was a relief, at least to the law-loving Western mind, to find any authority that would give a decided answer to a practical question; and such an authority men were beginning to find at Rome. Hence the rise of “decretals.” Liberius and Damasus, the next successors

<sup>1</sup> Leo, *Ep.* 43. This was “in spite of authentic information” (Bright). See Salmon, p. 409, on the deliberate substitution of “Silvester” for “Julius” in the Roman text of the canon.

of Julius, were each in their way great men, and did much to raise, on the whole, the prestige of their see, but they issued no decretals. This was reserved for Siricius. He appeals, it is true, to a precedent in the time of Liberius<sup>1</sup>, but we have no verification of this. The first document of the kind was issued in answer to a series of questions addressed by some Spanish bishops to Damasus, but which arrived in Rome after his death. Such appeals for advice had become common under Liberius and Damasus<sup>2</sup>, and had of course been answered. But the answer of Siricius on this occasion was marked by a fulness, and an authoritative tone<sup>3</sup>, which was recognized as opening a new epoch in papal utterances. Its date is Feb. 11, 385. But the authority of such utterances was still for long after this time moral only. No canon of the Church, no tradition outside Rome, no widespread conviction of church-

<sup>1</sup> An alleged circular to the provinces after the Council of Ariminum (359), forbidding the rebaptism of Arians.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome says that as secretary to Damasus he wrote answers to "synodical consultations" from East and West (Ep. cxxiii. *ad Agerr.*).

<sup>3</sup> Sohm, p. 418 note. It may be noted that Siricius begins the practice of dating these letters by the consuls, like imperial rescripts or laws.

men, accorded to a Roman bishop any right to lay down laws for the Church. Even Jerome, the most eminent Roman churchman of the time, in discussing matters<sup>1</sup> on which Siricius had laid down the law, entirely ignores<sup>2</sup> his decision. But the Roman See has never taken a step backward; the persevering repetition of the claim to legislate told in the course of time, and the series of decretals initiated by Siricius eventually worked their way into the canon law of Western Christendom.

In the East this was not the case. A sign of the diverging tradition of East and West may be seen in the attitude taken up by Jerome, a few years before this date, toward the schism of Antioch. Jerome found the Church of Antioch distracted by the claims of rival bishops, Meletius, Paulinus, and Vitalis. He writes<sup>3</sup> to Damasus to know whom to recognize, and uses words often quoted by advocates of Rome: "I attach myself to the See of Peter; on that rock I know the Church is built. Whoever eats the lamb outside this

<sup>1</sup> The disqualification of 'digamy' (1 Tim. iii. 2) for Holy Orders. Siricius had extended this to the case even of marriage previous to baptism.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep.* lxi. and in *Tt.* i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Epp.* xv, xvi (Vall.).

house is profane . . . I do not know Vitalis, I repudiate Meletius, for Paulinus I care not. Whoever gathers not with thee, scattereth . . . Whoever is joined to the chair of Peter, he is *my* man." Stronger language could hardly be used, and shortly afterwards we find him, consistently enough, in exclusive communion with Paulinus, whom Rome recognized as the rightful Bishop of Antioch. But all the while, the Eastern Churches recognized Meletius and regarded Paulinus as an intruder; and Meletius not only presided over the Second General Council, but is a canonised saint of the whole Church. Rome, as Tillemont remarks, is not ashamed to ask the prayers after their death of those whom she excluded from her communion while alive. Jerome's strong language does not embody the judgement of the Church of that time; it is not Catholic, but purely Roman<sup>1</sup>.

Of the tradition of the Eastern Churches it is beyond the limits of this lecture to speak. But I may say that while they cordially recognized the high prestige of the Roman bishops, and acknowledged the necessity of their assent to any decision which was to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *ib. Ep. 15. 3*: "*trium hypostaseon novellum a me homine Romano nomen exigitur.*"

carry with it the assent of the entire Church, they know nothing of any right of supremacy founded on the commission of our Lord to S. Peter.

This comes out clearly in their legislation. The second General Council raised the See of Constantinople to the second rank in Christendom, "because it is the new Rome." And the Council of Chalcedon, in confirming that law, formally recite that the fathers had adjudged the first rank to the See of Rome "*because that is the imperial city*<sup>1</sup>." This canon was fiercely resented by Leo the Great, who refused the assent which he was asked to give to it; but the Eastern Church always treated it as valid in law, and it forms part of their authoritative body of canons. By the time of Leo I, then, a distinct rift has opened between the Roman and the Greek conceptions of the Constitution of the Church. And it was this pope that obtained from the feeble Western Emperor Valentinian III a decree<sup>2</sup> (which duly refers

<sup>1</sup> Can. 28: διὰ τὸ βασιλεύειν τὴν πόλιν ἐκείνην. On Leo's attitude, see Salmon, *Infallibility*, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup> Dated June 6, 445, Novell. Valent. III. Tit. xvi. (Leo, *Ep.* 11); Sohm, p. 420. The Edict of Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius (A. D. 380, *Cod. Theod.* XVI. 1. 2) has no bearing on papal claims.



to the Sardican Canon as Nicene) establishing the supreme legislative and judicial authority of the Roman See over the entire Church. At last the constitution of the Church is legally assimilated to that of the empire; but at the cost of the Church's unity. The Papacy is, for the West, an accomplished fact; but by the same act Latin Christianity takes the place of the universal brotherhood of the Churches, and the seed is sown for the schisms of later times.

## V.

And now, briefly, to gather up our results. The Papacy has grown before our eyes, as we have followed the process by which the Church gradually grew from being a widely-spread brotherhood of simply organized societies, federated together by a purely spiritual bond. The spiritual bond has passed over into the form of constitutional law; law has taken the place of grace<sup>1</sup> as the principle of unity. And in Latin Christendom at least, the constitution has taken shape as a monarchy, the ecclesiastical counterpart of the Empire of Rome. The ecclesiastical monarchy indeed did not reach its full development till

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 14.

many centuries later than the period to which we followed its growth. But by the time of Leo the Great the essential principle had been evolved, and what followed was a matter of time only. And although the evolution of the monarchical principle meant a breach with Greek-speaking Christendom, it is none the less true that it was with the Latin Church that the future lay, that it has been Latin or Western Christendom that has created the Christian thought and Christian life of modern times. What of it then? Is our result the affirmation or the denial of the Roman claim to supremacy as a truth of our religion? Certainly we see in it a product of development, and part of the providential order of events in the history of the world. But the providence of God extends to all human and Christian history, and is not limited to any one product of development. If the Papacy was inevitable, so have been the revolts against it, the protest of the northern nations, the protest of England, and the English Christianity of which we know perhaps only the beginnings.

In the history of Old Testament religion, monarchy played a great and necessary part, and bequeathed many glorious ideals, many

fruitful principles, which did their work when the actual institution had served its time and passed away. But the monarchy of Israel was adopted only at the cost of the surrender of a yet higher and more spiritual ideal; and was, moreover, while it lasted, the direct cause of a breach of corporate unity which although attended with evil was none the less the result of a divine impulse, and not destructive of true covenant relation with God in the separated Tribes<sup>1</sup>. Monarchy in the Church, whether of the Old or the New Testament, has arisen in the providence of God, but it is no inherent or permanent principle of its constitution. We may frankly recognize its good, but must not allow ourselves to mistake the temporal for the eternal:

God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

And if we see, as the facts of history surely tell us plainly, that the development of monarchy in the Christian Church was a process to which purely external causes gave an initial impulse; a process into which human love of power and pride of place have from time to

<sup>1</sup> See a paper by the present writer in *The Thinker* for January, 1895.

time entered as active causes, mixed indeed, as love of power and pride of place are often mixed, with the sense of inherited responsibilities and zeal for the kingdom of God;—if, I say, spiritual ideals and motives of human infirmity, spiritual forces and unscrupulous worldly methods, have combined to build up little by little the great fabric of papal claims, our practical conclusion is not doubtful. The Papacy is part of the externals of the Christian faith, not a product of its deeper inward life; part of the changing garb which the Church of God must wear in the changing ages of human history, not of the indestructible identity of the faith which “overcometh the world,” the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

“Velut amictum mutabis eos, et mutabuntur :  
Tu autem idem ipse es, et anni tui non deficient.  
Ipsi peribunt, tu autem permanebis.”<sup>1</sup>

The Papacy has forgotten much that S. Paul knew and taught, has ignored many wholesome and true instincts which were alive and active in the early Church. But it has preserved much, and to what it has preserved it can still give energetic effect and expres-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. i. 11, 12.

sion. It has done much evil, but also much good ; and it will doubtless live on for many centuries with much power for good, with a true mission to great portions of mankind. But not to all. Those elements of the faith which Rome has lost are not dead, but living, and will assert their own, and find vehicles for their effectual work among Christian men, independently of Rome. The Papacy is a great product of human history and of human nature, and judged as such attracts our interest, our respect, our admiration. But looked at as claiming to be the sole embodiment of the kingdom of Christ on earth and the will of God for man, it stands before us a great image, whose feet are iron mixed with clay.

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